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- Varsity: largest paratrooper assault
- Inside the Rhine's Nazi defences

EBRO: SPAIN'S BLOODIEST BATTLE

PLUS

Boleslaw the Brave
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Chaco War

UNDEFEATED KING

How Edward IV dominated the Wars of the Roses

JAPAN'S SHOGUN WARS

Inside the bloody struggle between samurai warlords

FUTURE
ISSUE 079

KING & COUNTRY
UK AUTHORISED DEALER

The Kübelwagen Story

THE KÜBELWAGEN often called the *'German Jeep'*, is no stranger to KING & COUNTRY. Over the years K&C have produced more than their fair share of these small, compact WW2 vehicles that engineer *Ferdinand Porsche* designed for the German *Wehrmacht*.

Beginning as a military conversion of the famous ***Volkswagen 'Beetle'*** the first test samples had no doors and came fitted with bucket seats to prevent their occupants from falling out! These features helped give the vehicle its original name... ***The VW Kübelsitzwagen*** later shortened to simply... **THE KÜBELWAGEN.**

GOING TO WAR

Although formal approval for production was only granted in late 1938, pre-production models were field-tested and given their *'baptism of fire'* when Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939.

Actual combat conditions allowed for several important modifications to be made and full production began just before the *Invasion of France* in May 1940. From that point on production never ceased until Germany's final defeat in May 1945.

WH004

WH088

WH009

WH055

More than 50,000 *'Kübelwagens'* were built in those 5 years and they saw plenty of service from the frozen steppes of Russia to the blistering hot sands of North Africa... *and many points in between!*

K&C's LATEST KÜBELWAGENS

Here you see King & Country's latest *'Kübelwagen'* variants... *ALL* are *Wehrmacht* ambulance versions and the first to be released is **WH087** in a typical late-war camouflage of *'dunkelgelb'* yellow and *'feldgrau'* grey. This model comes with a *driver/medic* and a wounded *'stretcher case'*.

WH088 Kübelwagen is in the classic *'feldgrau'* of the early-war period and stands *'empty'* awaiting its driver and wounded passengers.

WH094 represents a 2-colour ***'Afrika Korps'*** version that would suit virtually any desert battlefield from *Tobruk* to *Tripoli*. All three are available now!

WH087

Also shown here are some other ***Wehrmacht*** medical-related figures and a great looking ***Opel Blitz Ambulance!***

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For more details about any of these King & Country vehicles and figures and much, much more contact **MAGPIE.**

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On page 26: discover the British engineering triumph during Operation Plunder

© Alamy

Welcome

Although Nazi Germany's borders had been infiltrated prior to March 1945, the first significant thrust into the Fatherland came with Operations Plunder and Varsity. Masterminded by Field Marshal Montgomery, this offensive would resemble the ill-fated Operation Market Garden months earlier – spearheaded with a massive airborne assault, supported by armour. However, unlike the disaster in the Netherlands, the crossing of the Rhine river would prove to be a resounding triumph of military engineering and planning, marking the beginning of the end for the Third Reich.

Tim Williamson
Editor-in-Chief

CONTRIBUTORS

TOM GARNER
Returning to his Medieval roots, this issue Tom explains why Edward IV should be remembered as one of England's greatest military tacticians, pointing to his impressive record during the Wars of the Roses (page 38).

MARTIN KING
Based in Belgium, Martin is an award-winning documentary filmmaker, researcher and battlefield guide. Starting on page 26 he reveals the engineering efforts behind Operation Plunder: the invasion of Nazi Germany.

JULES STEWART
A former Reuters journalist, Jules is a writer, researcher and translator, based between Spain and the UK. For this issue's Great Battles he recounts the bloody Battle of the Ebro (1938) during the Spanish Civil War (page 58).

STUART HADAWAY
Stuart is senior researcher at the Air Historical Branch (RAF) and has published several books on aviation history. In the Operator's Handbook he explores why Nazi Germany's Heinkel He. 177 bomber had such a flawed design (page 70).

1945 INVADING THE REICH

OPERATION PLUNDER

26 How the Allies crossed the Rhine river to bring about the end of the Third Reich

Frontline

JAPAN'S SENGOKU PERIOD

14 TIMELINE
Feudal Japan is plunged into chaos as rival warlords vie for domination

18 LEGENDS OF THE SENGOKU
Samurai warriors and mighty clan leaders battled for glory and honour on the battlefield

20 Q&A: JONATHAN CLEMENTS
This historian and author discusses the shifts in power during Japan's civil turmoil

22 BLADES, GUNPOWDER AND ARMOUR
This period saw a mixture of traditional and modern equipment and weaponry

24 THE BATTLE OF SEKIGAHARA
A final showdown between the Tokugawa and Toyotomi clans all but ends the Sengoku wars

HEROES OF THE MEDAL OF HONOR

46 This controversial Civil War veteran laid his body on the line at Gettysburg

GREAT BATTLES

58 The 1938 Battle of the Ebro was the largest clash of the Spanish Civil War

06 **WAR IN FOCUS**
Stunning imagery from throughout history

26 **OPERATION PLUNDER**
Historian Martin King uncovers the Allied engineering effort in crossing the Rhine into Germany, March 1945

34 **DEFENDING THE RHINE**
Jon Trigg explores the experience of outnumbered and outgunned German defenders during Operation Plunder

38 **EDWARD IV: WARRIOR OF YORK**
An overlooked but powerful Wars of the Roses leader

HEROES OF THE MEDAL OF HONOR

46 **DANIEL SICKLES**
This officer led his men to near doom at Gettysburg

52 **BOLESLAW THE BRAVE**
This 11th century warrior fought to win the Polish throne

GREAT BATTLES

58 **BATTLE OF THE EBRO**
The longest and deadliest battle of Spain's civil war

66 **THE CHACO WAR**
This bloody conflict tore South America apart

OPERATOR'S HANDBOOK

70 **HEINKEL HE. 177**
Inside the Nazis' flawed but prolific four-engine bomber

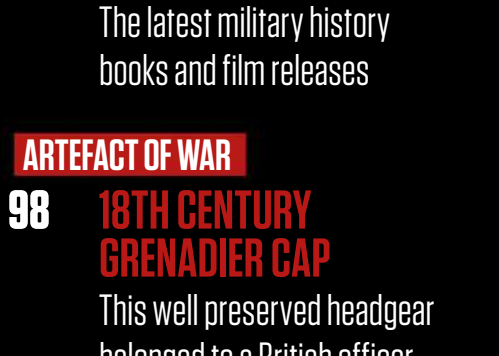
76 **BATTLE REPORT NORMANDY: PART II**
This captured document reveals the German assessment of the Normandy invasion in June-July 1944

OPERATOR'S HANDBOOK

70 Heinkel He. 177
Hitler's ailed four-engine bomber

Homefront

84 **MUSEUMS & EVENTS**
A roundup of the latest exhibitions and events



86 **RESISTANCE ASSASSINS**
Sophie Poldermans on the Dutch teenagers who targeted Waffen SS soldiers

90 **WWII THIS MONTH**
The crucial events taking place 80 years ago, in photos

92 **REVIEWS**
The latest military history books and film releases

ARTEFACT OF WAR

98 **18TH CENTURY GRENADIER CAP**
This well preserved headgear belonged to a British officer

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© Alamy

WAR in FOCUS

BATTLE FOR KUT

Taken: ***March, 2003***

US Marines take up position while fighting near the city of Kut, during the coalition invasion of Iraq. Kut, in the east of the country, was the scene of fierce fighting during the Iraq War, code named Operation Iraqi Freedom. It was previously the site of an Iraqi Air Force base. During WWI, a British garrison in Kut endured a five-month siege, before surrendering.

© Getty

WAR in FOCUS

FLIGHT DECK DOWNTIME

Taken: ***1982***

Crew of HMS Hermes relax on the carrier's flight deck, during a quiet moment of the Falkland's War. Hermes served as the Royal Navy's flagship during the conflict, where it operated Sea Harriers and Westland Sea King helicopters. Hermes was decommissioned two years later and sold to the Indian Navy, where it was renamed INS Viraat.

WAR in FOCUS

A WATERY GRAVE

Taken: ***5 April, 2015***

A Japanese seaplane, thought to be an Aichi E13A, shot down during the Second World War, lies on the seafloor near the Republic of Palau. The clear waters around these Pacific islands have enabled divers to easily discover the wrecks of numerous ships and planes – remnants of the long campaign fought between Japanese and Allied forces during WWII.

© Alamy

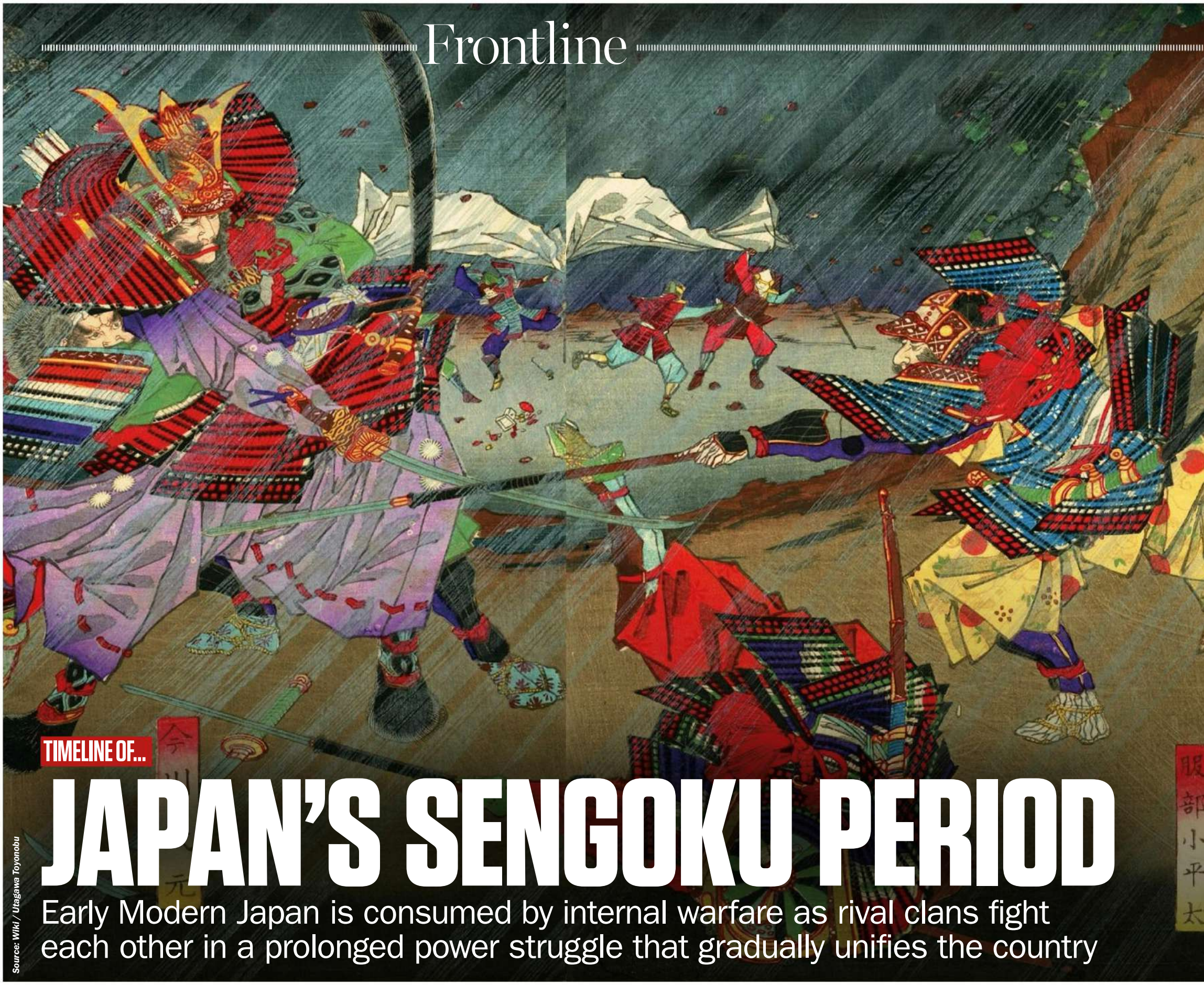
© Getty

WAR in FOCUS

VICTORY IN MOSCOW

Taken: ***24 June, 1945***

Red Army soldiers hold captured Nazi standards towards the ground, during the Victory Day Parade in Red Square, Moscow. The event involved over 40,000 members of the Soviet armed forces, as well as members of the Polish armed forces. On 9 May 1995 the parade was replicated to commemorate the 50th anniversary of victory over Nazi Germany.



Source: Wiki / Utagawa Toyonobu

TIMELINE OF...

JAPAN'S SENGOKU PERIOD

Early Modern Japan is consumed by internal warfare as rival clans fight each other in a prolonged power struggle that gradually unifies the country

15th century

EMPERORS, SHOGUNS AND DAIMYOS

During the late Medieval period, the emperor is officially the ruler of Japan but his role is largely ceremonial. Real power lies in the hands of the shogun, a noble warlord who forms a feudal military government. In the 15th century the shogunate gradually loses control over the subordinate daimyo lords who proceed to plunge the country into disorder.

Ashikaga Yoshimasa (1436-90) is the ruling shogun at the beginning of the Sengoku period

Source: Wiki / Tosa Mitsunobu

1467-77

ONIN WAR

A dispute between the Hosokawa and Yamana clans escalates into a nationwide civil war involving the Ashikaga shogunate and several daimyos across Japan. The war turns the Ashikaga shoguns into puppets of the Hosokawa until the 1550s and also initiates the Sengoku period.

© Alamy

The magnificent pagoda of Daigo-ji Buddhist temple in Kyoto was built in 951 and is one of the few buildings to have survived the destruction of the Onin War

16 October 1555

BATTLE OF MIYAJIMA 01

The powerful Ouchi clan is defeated by the numerically inferior forces of daimyo Mori Motonari on the sacred island of Miyajima in Aki Province. The Mori clan are subsequently able to establish a foremost position in western Japan.

The forces of Motonari arrive by ship to Miyajima

© Alamy

BATTLE OF NAGASHINO 03

Nobunaga and fellow daimyo Tokugawa Ieyasu lead a large army to relieve Nagashino Castle, which is besieged by Takeda Katsuyori. Using defensive positions, harquebusiers and spearmen, Nobunaga staves off a charge by Katsuyori. His samurai then engage in a fierce melee with the Takeda clansmen. Nobunaga's decisive outcome is hailed as Japan's first 'modern' battle.

© Alamy

An 18th century painted screen depiction of Nagashino

BATTLE OF OKEHAZAMA 02

2,000-3,000 Oda clansmen led by daimyo Oda Nobunaga dramatically defeat the combined forces of 25,000 warriors from the Imagawa and Matsudaira clans. Using gathered intelligence, Nobunaga wins by launching a surprise attack. A significant turning point in Japanese history, Nobunaga earns the fealty of many samurai and minor warlords.

Ukiyo-e of the Battle of Okehazama by 19th century antiquities artist Utagawa Toyonobu

SIEGE OF SHIGISAN 04

Forces of Nobunaga take Shigisan Castle from the Matsunaga clan to consolidate power in the Kansai area. The Matsunaga commander, Danjo Hisahide, commits ritual suicide with his son upon his defeat. Before he dies, Hisahide (a master of the tea ceremony) smashes his favourite tea bowl so that it does not fall into the hands of his enemies.

Danjo Hisahide prepares to commit suicide

© Alamy

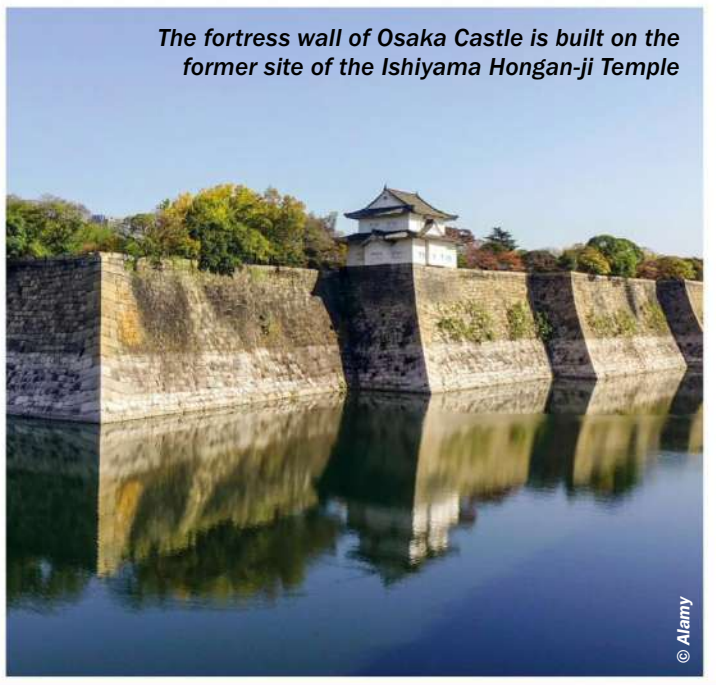
May-June 1560 — **28 June 1575** — **1577**

August 1570-August 1580 — **2 July 1582**

ISHIYAMA HONGAN-JI WAR

Oda Nobunaga's forces fight a ten-year war against a powerful faction of religious zealots called the Ikko-ikki. The Ikki's central base is the cathedral fortress of Ishiyama Hongan-ji. Nobunaga and his allies attack Ikki communities and fortifications in nearby provinces to weaken their support structure. Much of the fighting occurs at three sieges of Nagashima while Ishiyama Hongan-ji eventually surrenders to Nobunaga.

The fortress wall of Osaka Castle is built on the former site of the Ishiyama Hongan-ji Temple



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BATTLE OF YAMAZAKI 05

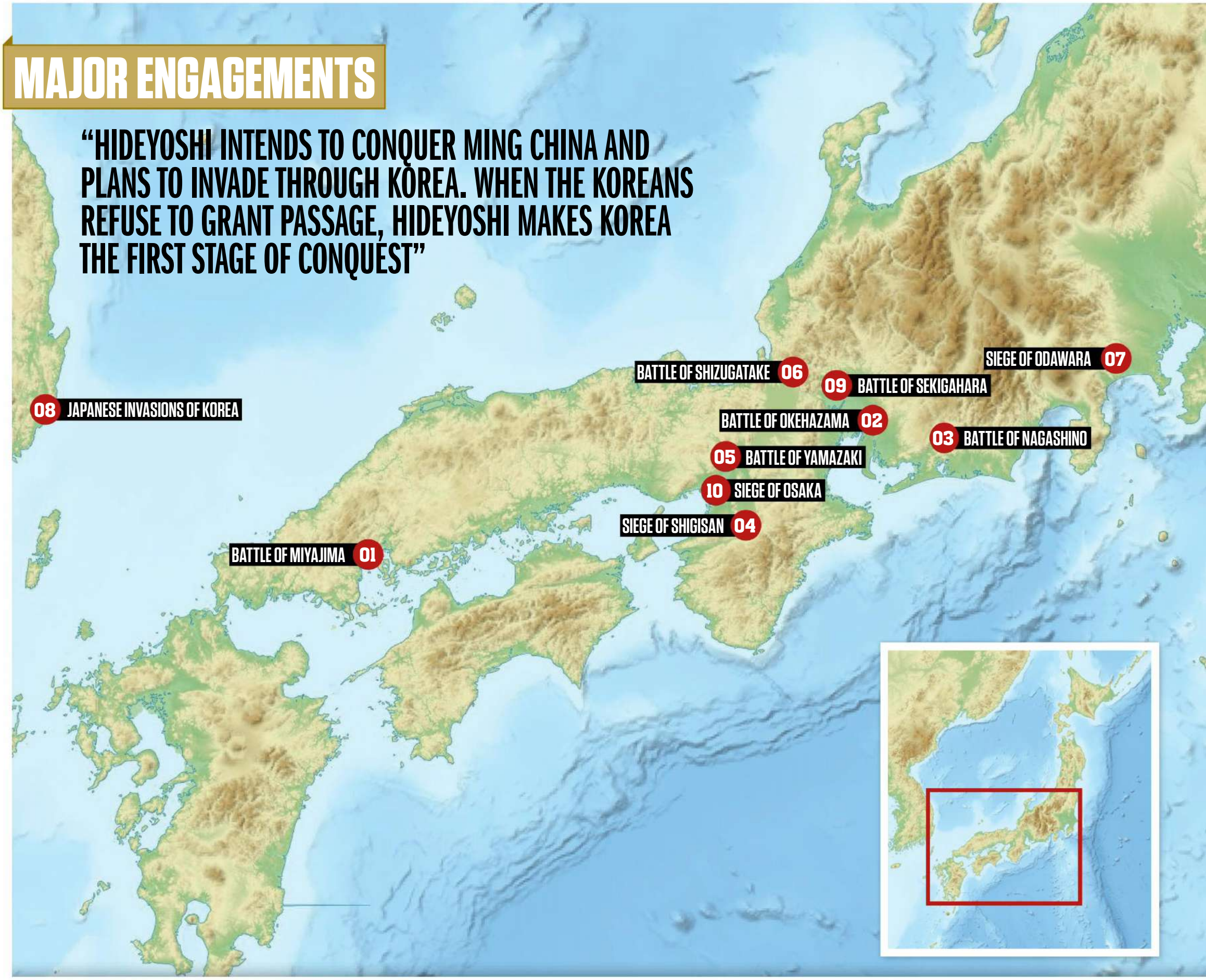
Akechi Mitsuhide, a retainer of Nobunaga, forces his master to commit ritual suicide and then assumes power. Nobunaga's subordinate, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, marches to confront Mitsuhide and engages him in a fierce battle. Hideyoshi wins the battle while Mitsuhide flees and is killed by bandits in the aftermath.

© Alamy

A war council meets before the Battle of Yamazaki

MAJOR ENGAGEMENTS

"HIDEYOSHI INTENDS TO CONQUER MING CHINA AND PLANS TO INVADE THROUGH KOREA. WHEN THE KOREANS REFUSE TO GRANT PASSAGE, HIDEYOSHI MAKES KOREA THE FIRST STAGE OF CONQUEST"



21 April 1583

May-August 1590

© Alamy

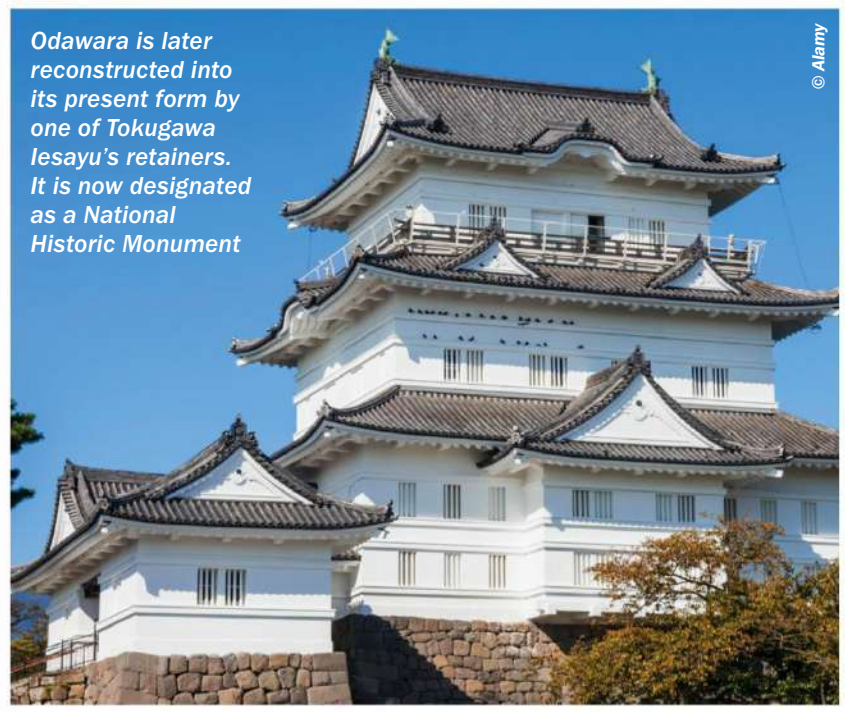
BATTLE OF SHIZUGATAKE 06

Hideyoshi is now the most powerful man in Japan but a line of his fortresses (including Shizugatake) above Lake Biwa are attacked by opposing Oda forces. Hideyoshi swiftly advances on Shizugatake and the Oda are defeated after being forced to adopt a hasty defensive posture.

Hirano Nagayasu is one of the 'Seven Spears of Shizugatake' who are mounted bodyguards for Hideyoshi. They successfully charge at a decisive moment of the battle and earn much fame and honour

SIEGE OF ODAWARA 07

Hideyoshi aims to eliminate the threat of the Hojo clan to his power. The Hojo hastily improve the defences of Odawara Castle before Hideyoshi's forces besiege it. The siege sees very little action with the besiegers enjoying entertainments while the defenders sleep on the ramparts. The castle surrenders after three months.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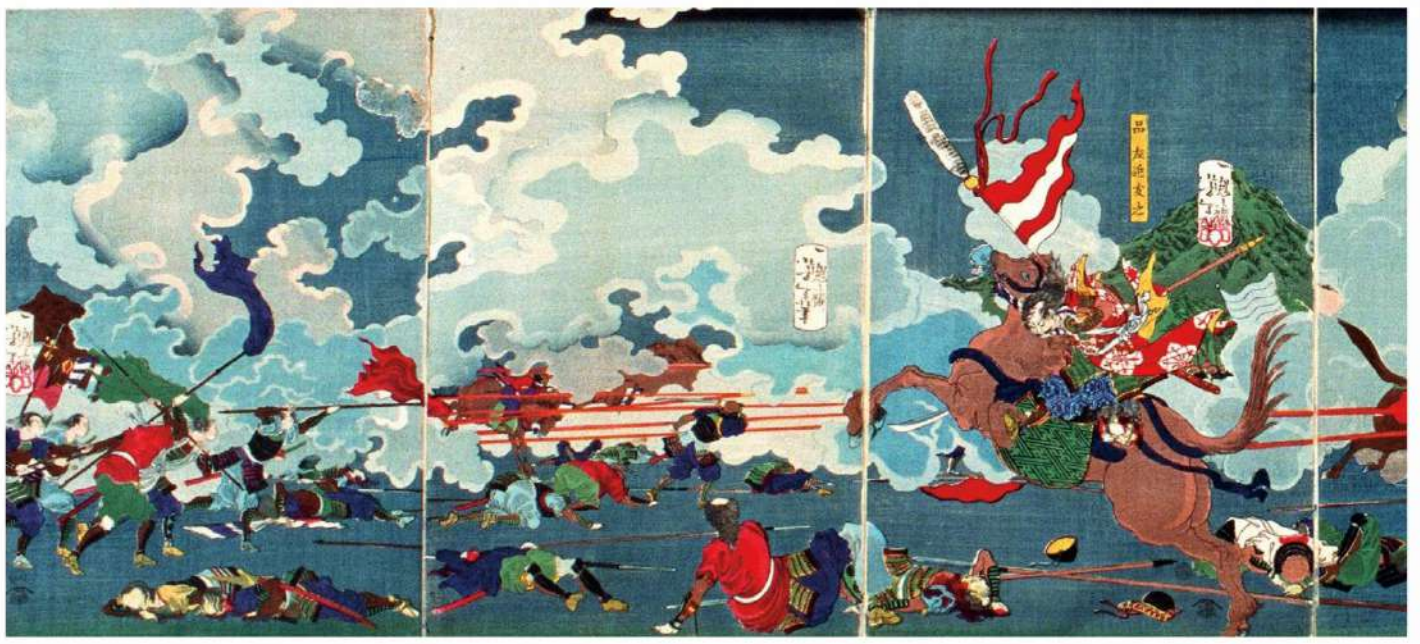
Odawara is later reconstructed into its present form by one of Tokugawa Iesayu's retainers. It is now designated as a National Historic Monument

© Alamy

Honda Tadatomo, one of Ieyasu's commanders, leads an attack against Hideyori's men

BATTLE OF TENNOJI

The Siege of Osaka climaxes with a battle outside the castle. Hideyori plans to lead the garrison against Iesayu's numerically superior force with other attacks elsewhere from his allies Akashi Morishige and Sanada Yukimura. The battle goes awry when Yukimara is killed and Morishige's encircling force is intercepted. When Iesayu's men enter the castle, Hideyori commits suicide in the keep. The last resistance to the Tokugawa shogunate is eliminated.



BATTLE OF SEKIGAHARA 09

Hideyoshi's death leads to a power struggle between Tokugawa Ieyasu and an alliance led by Ishida Mitsunari. At Sekigahara, Mitsunari is betrayed during the battle by his ally Kobyakawa Hideaki. Mitsunari is killed and Iesayu's victory eventually leads to the Tokugawa shogunate, which is the last to control Japan until 1868.

The decisions Japan's warlords made at the Battle of Sekigahara would determine the fate of their clans for centuries to come

21 October 1600

23 May 1592-16 December 1598

8 November 1614-22 January 1615, May-June 1615

3 June 1615

JAPANESE INVASIONS OF KOREA 08

Hideyoshi intends to conquer Ming China and plans to invade through Korea. When the Koreans refuse to grant passage, Hideyoshi makes Korea the first stage of conquest. Two invasions are launched in the samurai's only assault on a foreign country. The Japanese even reach Manchuria but the Koreans and Chinese vigorously fight back. After Hideyoshi's death, Japanese armies withdraw from Korea.

Japanese forces perform an amphibious landing before besieging the fortress at Busan, Korea

© Alamy

SIEGE OF OSAKA 10

The Tokugawa shogunate is contested by a daimyo alliance led by Hideyoshi's son Toyotomi Hideyori. His followers gather at Osaka Castle, which is then besieged by Ieyasu. After a winter bombardment a peace treaty is organised but Hideyori soon declares Ieyasu to be a rebel to the imperial throne and the siege resumes.

© Alamy

A detail of the fighting at Osaka from a folding screen that is commissioned by Kuroda Nagasama, a general who participates at the siege

LEGENDS OF THE SENGOKU

This period of perpetual warfare gave rise to some military giants – samurai, puffed up with bravado, who embodied a rigid warrior code

Toyotomi Hideyoshi was both a military and political genius, totally reforming Japanese society under his control

TOYOTOMI HIDEYOSHI
ODA AND TOYOTOMI CLANS 1558-1598

Born the son of a farmer and part-time soldier in a backwater village, Hideyoshi left home in his mid-teens, eventually joining the ranks of the up-and-coming warlord, Oda Nobunaga, in 1558.

Originally serving as Nobunaga's sandal bearer, he rose through the ranks on his wit, charm and martial merit – eventually proving himself a spectacular general. He was instrumental in Nobunaga's conquest, helping his lord seize a third of the country – for which he was awarded his own fief. When Nobunaga was betrayed in 1582 and committed seppuku, an outraged Hideyoshi avenged his master at lightning speed – killing the traitor at the Battle of Yamazaki, and cementing his own position as Nobunaga's spiritual successor. After a brief conflict with Tokugawa Ieyasu, the latter acquiesced. Eager to reinforce his might with the right to rule, Hideyoshi had himself adopted into the Fujiwara clan – which had held a monopoly over the imperial regency – allowing him to become the first ever non-Fujiwara regent, before installing a puppet emperor. After crushing the Shimazu and Hojo clans, Hideyoshi completed Nobunaga's spectacular unification of Japan. A master administrator, he oversaw a dramatic centralisation of power, reforming the tax system, dividing society into warrior, merchant, artisan and peasant groups, setting strict rules and rights for each. He went on to confiscate weapons from all farmers and warrior monks.

Having delivered peace to Japan, fuelled by delusions of grandeur, Hideyoshi directed the country's war apparatus outwards. Bragging of his plans to conquer China, he launched an enormous 200,000-man invasion of Korea in 1592 – a violent campaign that turned into a stalemate once China came to its vassal's aid. Growing increasingly erratic in old age, Hideyoshi died in 1598, bringing his Korean campaign to a rapid close, and ushering in a last deadly stage of civil war.

Source: Wiki/Utagawa Kuniyoshi

ODA NOBUNAGA
ODA CLAN 1551-1582

Oda Nobunaga was just a teenager when his father, the chief of Owari, died and spent the next eight years battling his family for control. In 1560, he was attacked by a neighbouring warlord's army of 25,000, which he defeated in spectacular fashion with a ragtag bunch of just 3,000 peasants and ruffians. Emboldened, Nobunaga struck up a series of alliances and conquered his way to the capital in just eight years, installing a new shogun, before waging a ruthless war against the country's powerful warrior monks. He was an early adopter of the arquebus, perfecting its use at the 1575 Battle of Nagashino. Here he used three lines of mass volleys to devastate the Takeda's notorious cavalry charge.

Ever an innovator, he not only built the revolutionary Azuchi Castle, but designed Japan's first ever armoured ships. However, in 1582, having conquered a third of the country, he was betrayed by one of his own vassals – forcing him to commit suicide by seppuku.

Oda Nobunaga was a ruthless general, making friends of his enemies, or else destroying them without mercy

TOKUGAWA IEYASU
TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE 1558-1615

Tokugawa Ieyasu was thrust onto the grand stage after his lord was killed while invading Oda Nobunaga in 1560. The two young generals struck up an alliance, and as Nobunaga emerged the pre-eminent warlord, Ieyasu grew immensely wealthy and powerful – dealing the Takeda their final death knell in 1582.

After Nobunaga's suicide, Ieyasu briefly fought his successor Hideyoshi, before swearing fealty to him.

Under Hideyoshi's rule, Ieyasu was the country's wealthiest lord, ruling the eight provinces of Kanto, bringing in 2.5 million koku annually – food for 2.5 million people; more than Hideyoshi himself. When Hideyoshi died, although he appointed his five-year-old son Hideyori his successor, as the senior-most member of the council of elders, Ieyasu finally made a bid for power himself – culminating in the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, where he emerged victorious.

Three years later, following decades of patient political manipulations, Ieyasu was declared shogun, formalising his authority over the country he and his two successors had fought so hard to unite. After centuries of war, Japan was finally at peace.

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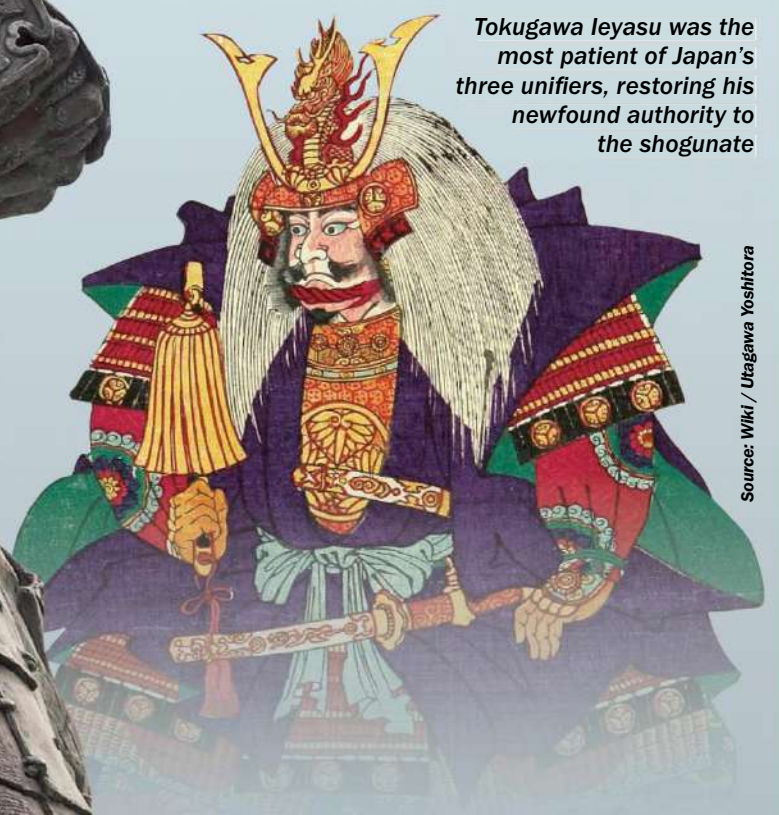


Tokugawa Ieyasu was the most patient of Japan's three unifiers, restoring his newfound authority to the shogunate

Source: Wiki / Utagawa Yoshitora

KATO KIYOMASA
TOYOTOMI AND TOKUGAWA CLANS 1573-1611

Kato Kiyomasa was raised in the fire of war, by Hideyoshi himself. In 1583, at the Battle of Shizugatake he fought on horseback, killing so many with his cross-bladed spear, he was dubbed one of Hideyoshi's 'Seven Spears of Shizugatake'.

Hideyoshi rewarded his brilliance with a fief in Higo, where he developed a long-standing rivalry with another of Hideyoshi's favourites, Konishi 'Agostinho' Yukinaga.

A fanatic Buddhist, Kiyomasa loathed having to share with a Christian. The two both played leading roles in Hideyoshi's invasion of Korea, where Kiyomasa became the only general to push all the way into China itself.

Aside from hunting Korean tigers, Kato Kiyomasa was said to have stopped one in its tracks with just a glance

After Hideyoshi's death, he returned to Japan, siding with the Tokugawa, while Konishi picked the opposing side. After the battle of Sekigahara, Konishi was executed, and Kiyomasa seized his holdings. Ever loyal, he sought to protect Hideyoshi's son and Ieyasu's rival, Hideyori, from harm, but died during negotiations – perhaps poisoned on Ieyasu's orders.

Source: Wiki / LAMCA

TAKEDA SHINGEN
TAKEDA CLAN 1536-1573

Born in 1521, Takeda Shingen proved his brilliance at the age of 15, using subterfuge to capture a fortress his father had failed to take by brute force. Five years later, he flat out seized the province of Kai for himself, leading the Takeda clan to bold new heights.

Brutal in victory, he entered a legendary rivalry with the neighbouring Uesugi clan, fighting five successive battles at Kawanakajima. He not only boasted the most powerful cavalry charge in Japan, but was an early adopter of firearms, hiring hundreds of arquebusiers to tip the odds in his favour. A brilliant warrior, he even engaged in single combat against the Uesugi leader, Uesugi Kenshin.

After allying with Oda Nobunaga he was convinced by the shogun to attack the upstart warlord, dealing him and Tokugawa Ieyasu a devastating defeat with a masterclass in cavalry warfare at the Battle of Mikatagahara. However, he died soon after, leaving his clan's fortune in the hands of his less capable son, Katsuyori.

Takeda Shingen came closer than anyone to defeating Oda Nobunaga and Tokugawa Ieyasu

Source: Wiki / Utagawa Kuniyoshi

SHOGUN SHOWDOWNS

Broadcaster and author of *A Brief History Of Japan*, Jonathan Clements, shares his thoughts on the changing nature of power, authority and legitimacy during the Sengoku period

What was the nature of the shogunate during the Sengoku period?

Our more 'modern' sense of what the word 'shogun' means comes in the late Heian period, when you have emperors and retired emperors prepared to use the samurai houses as pawns in their own struggle over power. So, a shogunate gets confirmed because an emperor wants some samurai muscle, and it's a title that can either reflect who the top dog is among the samurai, or who the top dog is among the contending emperors and retired emperors. We do get several occasions where 'shogun' itself becomes a figurehead position, because the real power is somewhere else, and I think that's what you get with the Ashikaga collapse.

Throughout the Sengoku period, what were the most potent new sources of authority?

After the Portuguese arrive on Tanegashima, the Japanese suddenly acquire access to firearms, and that transforms the nature of modern warfare. The samurai hated matchlocks, because you could literally pick some peasant at random and show him how to use it, and you could have him battle-ready in two or three days.

A lot of the politicking in the Sengoku period often cloaks machinations behind the scenes about who has access to foreign contacts. Sometimes, it's about religion – either for real or for show. You get the Christian daimyo, particularly in the south, striking deals with the Jesuits over silk trade and arms, and you get entire domains converting en masse to Christianity. Sometimes it's truly heartfelt belief

from people who are prepared to die for it, and that really spooks the samurai, because the last thing they want is a bunch of fractious domains, united by a shared religious belief, paying homage to a foreign leader.

How successful was Hideyoshi's attempt to legitimise his authority?

I think the most important issue there is that Hideyoshi didn't become shogun. He's a new man, he can fight and claw his way up the ranks, and amass power and wealth, but he'll never be one of the old samurai families.

Class and old money always try to hang on. There were periods when the samurai were just expendable pawns, used by the elite in Kyoto to fight over distant holdings and to keep themselves on top in court politics. The samurai era, such as we know it, begins when those pawns suddenly come back and demand to be let into the capital, to enjoy the court life themselves. They take over the court, they take over the capital, and they ruin it.

Was the shogunate stronger at the end of the Sengoku period?

The Tokugawa Shogunate was stronger, I think, because of the absolute lock-down that Ieyasu imposed on everything. He could switch out lords and shutter provincial ruling houses. He could, and did, order only a single castle, so there was nowhere for people to fortify if they rebelled. When the Shimabara Rebellion broke out in 1637, you have the bizarre sight of the warlords in the next domain literally waiting on the border, unable to leave their own province to make a counter-attack until specific permission arrives from Edo. Ieyasu and his successors shut out foreign influences, to the best of their ability. They kept all the samurai dancing around them with their compulsory attendance, which sapped up to 30 per cent of a domain's annual budget and ensured that there were always family hostages in Edo as collateral against rebellion.

"AFTER THE PORTUGUESE ARRIVE ON TANEGASHIMA, THE JAPANESE SUDDENLY ACQUIRE ACCESS TO FIREARMS, AND THAT TRANSFORMS THE NATURE OF MODERN WARFARE"

What do you think the shogunate would have looked like with Hideyori in charge?

If he had won, possibly Edo would have declined, and the centre of power in Japan would have been Osaka instead. But then the Kanto plain would have formed a potential power base for some new upstart, and we would have been plunged into another bunch of regional conflicts. It is just speculation, but maybe we should consider the degree to which geography created the way Japanese history would unfold during the Tokugawa period. The Tokugawa had Edo, which was the largest area of exploitable land. They were able to create a new centre for themselves. So, it should perhaps come as no surprise that in the 19th century, when the emperor was 'restored' and the Tokugawa finally brought down, the new official power centre of Japan was declared in Edo, and it was renamed To-kyo, the eastern capital.

***Below:** Despite amassing unprecedented power and authority, Hideyoshi's obscure origins meant he was never able to secure the position of shogun, instead relying on imperial prestige*

Source: Wiki / LACMA

ARMOUR, BLADES & GUNPOWDER

Soldiers of the Sengoku period used a variety of weapons and protective equipment that reflected the military and cultural changes within Japan

Sengoku Japan was known as the 'time of battles' and the martial character of the Japanese clans who fought each other represented a watershed in military technology. Many aspects of soldiering were still Medieval with an emphasis on swords, shields and armour. However, the European Renaissance arrived on Japanese shores with the Portuguese and they introduced artillery and firearms that would revolutionise the way battles and sieges were conducted on the island and abroad.

ARMOUR

Highly distinctive and recognised as some of the most famous military protective clothing ever created, Japanese armour was noticeably elaborate. Nevertheless, Sengoku armourers also needed to quickly produce practical suits to match the demands of the battlefield.

KABUTO

The helmet is made from iron and leather plates with a shikoro neck guard. Worn by samurai and their retainers, the kabuto played a symbolic as well as protective role, with frontal decorations known as maedate often depicting animals.

SODE

These large, rectangular pieces are made from iron and acted as shoulder protection. Formed into scales, sode could also be made from leather and protected the arms from the elbows to the shoulders.

HAIDATE

Designed with a similar purpose to the sode, the small, metal plates of the haidate protected the thighs. It could also protect other parts depending on the length including the knee and upper calf.

DO

Strongly influenced by European cuirasses, the do was the largest part of the armour. Designed to protect the chest, it was made from iron plates with decorated straps. The pictured do is a haraate ('protection of the abdomen').

Source: Wiki / Sukkoria

TACHI

One of the most recognisable Japanese swords, the tachi was used extensively by samurai warriors. With its prominent curve, the tachi was most effective when used by cavalry. However, Sengoku combat against infantry spearmen led to the development of a more disposable sword called the uchigatana.

A tachi blade dating from the late 16th century. Some high-ranking warriors would wear their sword with the edge downwards rather than with edge upwards through a scabbard

Source: Wiki / Metropolitan Museum of Art

With a blade measuring between 30-60cm, wakizashi is an abbreviated form of wakizashi no katana ('sword thrust at one's side')

WAKIZASHI

In use from the 15th century, the wakizashi was used as an auxiliary sword for close-quarters fighting or to behead a defeated opponent. It was one of several short swords used by the samurai and was sometimes used by warriors to commit seppuku (ritual suicide).

Source: Wiki / Kakidai

The Portuguese first brought guns into Japan on the island of Tanegashima, which gave its name to the Japanese guns

TANEGASHIMA

First introduced by the Portuguese in 1543, the tanegashima was a matchlock arquebus. It was soon manufactured by the Japanese and used extensively during the later Sengoku period. Because the tanegashima was slow to load, various techniques were developed to improve the firing quality as well as staggered firing tactics. The tanegashima came to symbolise the military revolution that swept through Japan at this time.

© Alamy

The swivel gun was developed in Europe and introduced into Japan by the Portuguese

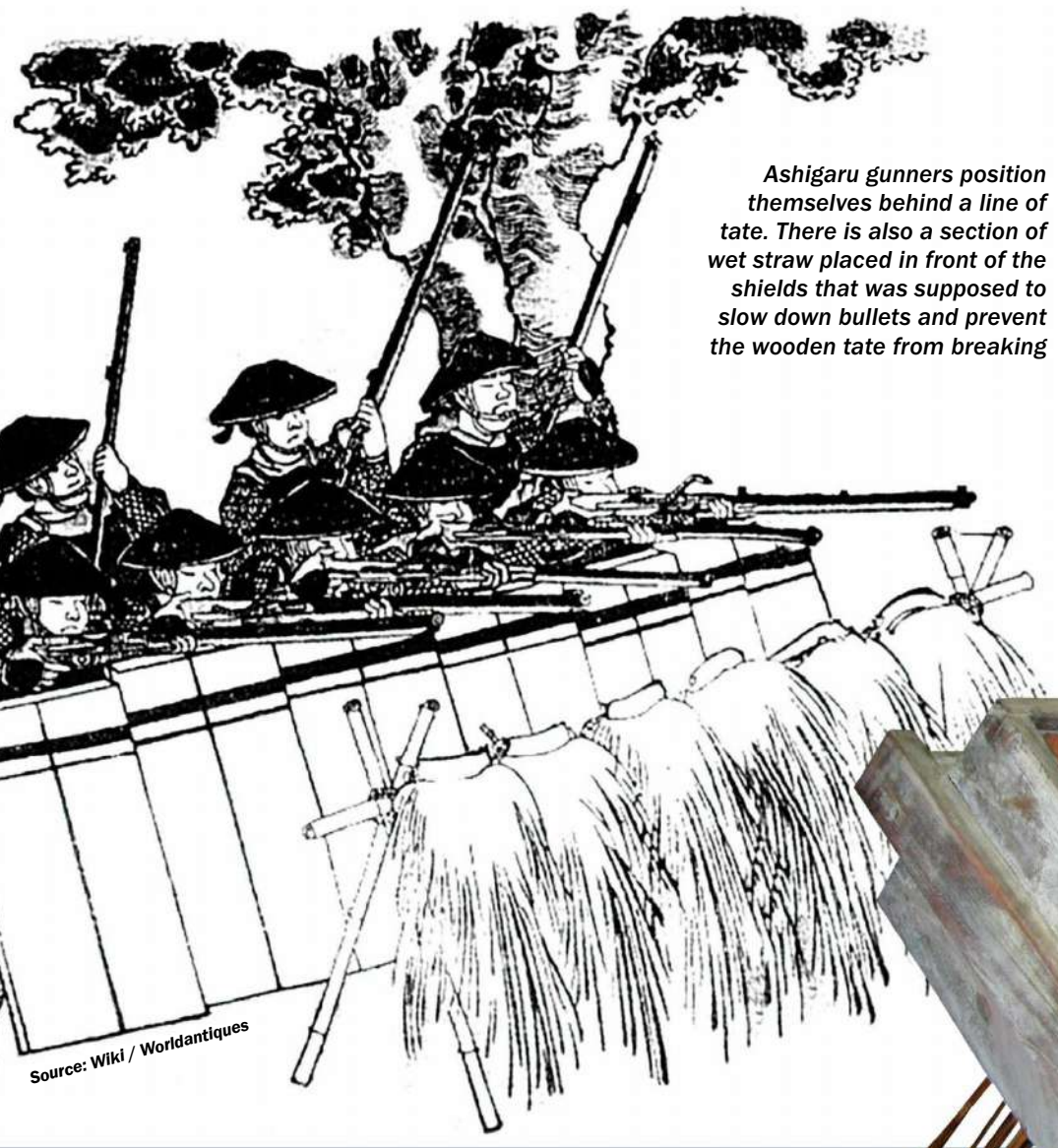
BREECH LOADING SWIVEL GUN

Introduced into Japan by the Portuguese from the 1550s, this gun had a high rate of fire and swivel for easy rotation. Daimyo Otomo Sorin used them at the Siege of Moji in 1561 and they were later deployed at the Battle of Takjo in 1587.

© Alamy

TATE

Made from wood, riveted iron plates or even lacquered rawhide, tate were rectangular shields. They were used by ashigaru infantry units. Firearms and cannon could easily destroy a tate but new designs were developed to cover ranged units on the battlefield. The shields were often supplemented by taketaba, which were thick bundles of rolled bamboo.



Ashigaru gunners position themselves behind a line of tate. There is also a section of wet straw placed in front of the shields that was supposed to slow down bullets and prevent the wooden tate from breaking

Source: Wiki / Worldantiques

HWACHA

The hwacha were early multiple rocket launchers developed in Korea. Some could fire 100 rocket arrows or 200 small 'Chontong' bullets. They were extensively used by the Koreans during the Japanese invasions of the 1590s. At the Battle of Haengju, 3,400 Koreans repelled 30,000 Japanese with the help of 40 hwachas.

A reconstruction of a Korean hwacha. At Haengju, the samurai infantry inadvertently assisted the hwachas' performance by advancing in dense formations

Source: Wiki / Draq

SEKIGAHARA

In 1600, after 150 years of perpetual violence, Japan's warlords united behind two coalitions, for a samurai battle to end them all

When Toyotomi Hideyoshi died in 1598, he left a unified Japan in the hands of his five-year-old son, Hideyori – appointing a council of regents, comprising the country's five most powerful lords. However, as the samurai returned home from the disastrous invasion of Korea, the regents split into two factions – one led by the Hideyori loyalist, Ishida Mitsunari, and the other by their senior-most member, Tokugawa Ieyasu.

Having spent decades helping to unify the realm, Ieyasu had sacrificed too much to leave it in the hands of a child. A veteran of unparalleled prestige and power, he controlled an eighth of Japan's wealth, bringing in enough food for 2.5 million people every year. In August 1599, as tensions erupted into full-blown conflict, Japan's warlords were forced to pick a side. After a series of sieges, the two coalitions finally met along the Nakasendo Road, running through Mitsunari's heartland of Omi.

Drawing blood

Mitsunari's Western Army arrived first, setting up favourable positions along a foggy mountain valley. Utilising a crane-like formation, he planned to draw the Eastern Army in, before attacking both flanks, and then the rear, sealing the enemy in a rectangular tomb. With Ieyasu fielding 88,888 soldiers, and Mitsunari 81,890, this would be a battle of epic proportions. Among the most unpredictable of allies was Kobayakawa Hideaki, a 19-year-old general, and Hideyoshi's foster son. Though he bore a grudge against Mitsunari for disrespecting his efforts in Korea, he assured him he would join his side, once the signal fire was lit.

As the fog lifted at 8.00am, commanding from a mountain top, Ieyasu ordered the attack. The gregarious general Ii Naomasa took it upon himself to initiate hostilities, hurtling into the heart of the Western Army, followed by his legendary Red Devils – 3,600 shock cavalry dressed in red lacquered armour, with red-shafted lances. They crashed into the enemy with such fury, they punched all the way through to their rear line.

The Red Devils were supported by Eastern Army arquebusiers, firing volleys, as 20,000 of Tokugawa's men rushed into the foray, gagging to wrench the head off the treacherous Mitsunari. As the two sides slashed and stabbed at one another with swords and spears, Mitsunari wheeled out five cannons, pushing the Easterners back.

As more generals hurtled themselves down from the mountaintops, crashing into the Western flank, one soldier wrote, "Musket fire and the shouts echoed from the heavens and shook the earth. The black smoke rose, making the day as night." With only 35,000 of his men committed so far, Mitsunari asked his rearguard, led by the elderly Shimazu Yoshihiro, to join in, only to be told, "In this battle, each unit must look to its own affairs and fight its own battles with all its might. There is no time to be concerned with the affairs of others." Just as the two armies lined up perfectly, he finally

Above: An Edo period depiction of Sekigahara from the 1620s

© Alamy

lit his signal flare – it was time for his allies to smash into the enemy's two flanks. To his horror, however, the 19-year-old Hideaki, and his 15,000 men, did not budge – paralysing several more allies.

The victors and the vanquished

Ieyasu sensed the battle would be won and lost on Hideaki's next move. Desperate to force the young man's hand, he had his gunners fire on his position. It worked. Hideaki leaped onto his horse and ordered his men to attack the Western Army's flank. Already engaged on the front, there was little the grizzled general Otani Yoshitsugu could do, but order a sobbing retainer to cut off and hide his head from the enemy. Their hand forced, other Western generals followed Hideaki's lead, turning on Mitsunari, until his forces were utterly decimated and routed. Ieyasu finally donned his helmet, booming, "After victory, tighten the cords of your helmet."

After Sekigahara, Ieyasu put his enemies to the sword, forgiving those who had returned to his side during the battle, and generously rewarding his loyal supporters. As a Christian, Konishi Yukinaga tuned down the chance to commit ritualistic suicide by seppuku. Mitsunari was not even offered the opportunity – both were beheaded in Kyoto. In 1603, Ieyasu was appointed the shogun, and 12 years later, launched an almighty siege of Hideyori's castle at Osaka – compelling him to commit suicide, and cementing a dynasty that would rule over a peaceful domain for centuries.

HONOUR ON THE BATTLEFIELD

FOR SAMURAI, MAINTAINING PROPER MANNERS AND ETIQUETTE WAS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT ON THE BATTLEFIELD

Even during the climax of the bloodthirsty Sengoku era, the samurai were men of honour. Their commitment to formality and manners, even in the face of death, at times bordered on the surreal. Although Ieyasu wanted his general Fukushima Masanori to lead the charge, glory notwithstanding, Ii Naomasa felt it was not appropriate for a man who had been so close to Hideyoshi to strike the first blow against the forces of his son.

It could be argued that honour itself played a crucial role in the outcome. While they were drawing out their battle plans, had Mitsunari not spoken over the elderly Shimazu Yoshihiro, dismissing his contribution, perhaps he would have found him a more committed ally.

In a humorous anecdote, when an antsy Ieyasu sent a follower to ask his general Kuroda Nagamasa if the 19-year-old Hideaki was going to turn in his favour, the panicked messenger addressed him by his province name, calling out, "Koshu, Koshu, do you know, will Lord Hideaki join us or not?" With typical samurai swagger, Nagamasa spat, "Even if he doesn't join us, we can cut through Ishida and eliminate Kobayakawa's men and Ukita's easily. Now if you don't mind, I have my men to look to." Once the messenger left, he scowled to his lieutenant, "That man has no understanding of what manners are. Yes, we are in combat, but there is no cause to neglect etiquette. How rude, calling out 'Koshu, Koshu!' like that!"

Mitsunari's failure to pay proper respect to his allies may have been his downfall

1945 INVADING THE REICH

OPERATION PLUNDER

WORDS **MARTIN KING**

At 9.00pm on 23 March 1945, following weeks of almost continuous heavy aerial and artillery bombardments, Montgomery's 21st Army Group launched Operation Plunder. This would finally take the Allies across the River Rhine north of the industrial heartland of the Ruhr and place them in a strong position to deliver the coup de gràce against the Third Reich

Martin is an author, award-winning documentary filmmaker and battlefield guide. He has published histories on the Battle of the Bulge and the US 4th Infantry Division and regularly lectures on American and Allied operations during the liberation of Europe.

In the spring of 1945, Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery was appointed to lead the last great offensive in the West. Just beyond the east bank of the swollen River Rhine was Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring, commanding around 80 rather depleted German divisions, in sturdy defensive positions. The Rhine was going to be a formidable obstacle at that time of year, but it wasn't insurmountable. The Allies could deploy three armies in the coming offensive: the Canadian 1st, the British 2nd and the US 9th. With the right plan and equipment this final natural barrier could be successfully navigated and for Montgomery, the abject failure of Operation Market Garden the previous autumn could be consigned to history – not that he ever regarded it as a failure.

The Allies had already encroached the borders of Hitler's thousand-year empire, but had been caught napping at the Battle of the Bulge, which was in effect Hitler's last serious offensive in the West. With Allied composure restored at the beginning of February 1945, almost half a million soldiers, with over 1,000 guns and 34,000 vehicles, had assembled along a ten-kilometre front. They were prepared to remove the Nazis from the Netherlands and reach the Rhine. For the British and Canadian troops it was the largest operation since Normandy and it proved to be a tough fight, but Montgomery had achieved his goal. Now he prepared for the next mission.

© Nicholas Forder

Artist's illustration of British LVTs crossing the Rhine

The infamous bridge at Remagen had been taken intact by the US 9th Armoured Division between 7 and 8 March 1945. Apart from costing Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt his job, the capture of this bridge enabled US forces to establish their first foothold on the eastern side of the Rhine. Further north General William Hood Simpson's US 9th Army held the west bank of the Rhine, from the south of Düsseldorf to the mouth of the Lippe River at the village of Wesel.

Patton strikes early

Despite the absence of official orders, General George Patton's US 5th (Diamond) Division established a six-mile deep bridgehead after crossing the Rhine River during the night of 22 March 1945. Patton's commanding officer, General Omar Bradley had issued express orders to prevent Patton from doing precisely this. Bradley was no fan of Montgomery, but remained insistent that nothing should interfere with Operation Plunder.

Patton just wanted to have the puerile accolade of having crossed the Rhine before the British. In his head he really believed that he was in competition with Montgomery when in fact nothing could have been further from the truth. Montgomery was too far up the pecking order and far too arrogant to be troubled by the pugilistic general and the machinations of his 3rd Army in the south. Nevertheless Patton remained hell bent on glory and had every intention of leading the charge all the way to Berlin. This is probably the only thing he had in common with Field Marshal Montgomery, but as things transpired neither commander would be permitted that accolade.

Monty's immediate plan in the early spring of 1945 was to strike east on a relatively narrow frontage, which would bring the Allies in close proximity to the northern edge of the Ruhr cities. Once there, they would make contact with US 1st Army, and in effect take full possession of the area that Allied air command had failed to subjugate, despite extensive carpet bombing. From mid-February up until 21 March 1945, Allied air forces had embarked on a concentrated heavy bombing campaign called 'Interdiction of Northwest Germany'. During this period Allied Bomber Command conducted 1,792 sorties and unleashed 31,635 tons of bombs in an attempt to cauterise the whole Rhur area.

"IT'S GENERALLY AGREED THAT MONTGOMERY WAS A FASTIDIOUS AND METICULOUS PLANNER WHO RARELY CONSIDERED ANY OFFENSIVE UNLESS THE ODDS WERE DECIDEDLY IN HIS FAVOUR"

The next major step for the Allies would be known as Operation Plunder, the umbrella for four other major ground operations and one airborne. Operation Turnscrew would be 30 Corps' Rhine crossing at Rees. Operation Widgeon entailed the 1st Commando Brigade's Rhine crossing a little further south at Wesel. Operation Torchlight, 12 Corps' Rhine crossing at Xanten and Operation Flashpoint was going to be the US 9th Army's Rhine crossing around Rheinberg on the right flank of the British position. The objective of the airborne element Operation Varsity commanded by General Matthew B. Ridgway's 18th Airborne Corps, was to capture Wesel and secure a bridgehead north of the River Lippe and be in effect the last great airborne assault of WWII. Shortly after the ground forces had navigated the Rhine the British 6th Airborne Division ('Red Devils'), commanded by Major General Eric L. Bols, and the US 17th Airborne Division ('Thunder from Heaven') would be landed in quite close proximity to the advancing ground troops not far behind German lines, enabling them to connect with ground forces quickly.

It's generally agreed that Montgomery was a fastidious and meticulous planner who rarely considered any offensive unless the odds were decidedly in his favour, and this time they most definitely were. Many at SHAEF considered him as over cautious, and some opinions regarding the field marshal's military acumen were positively hostile.

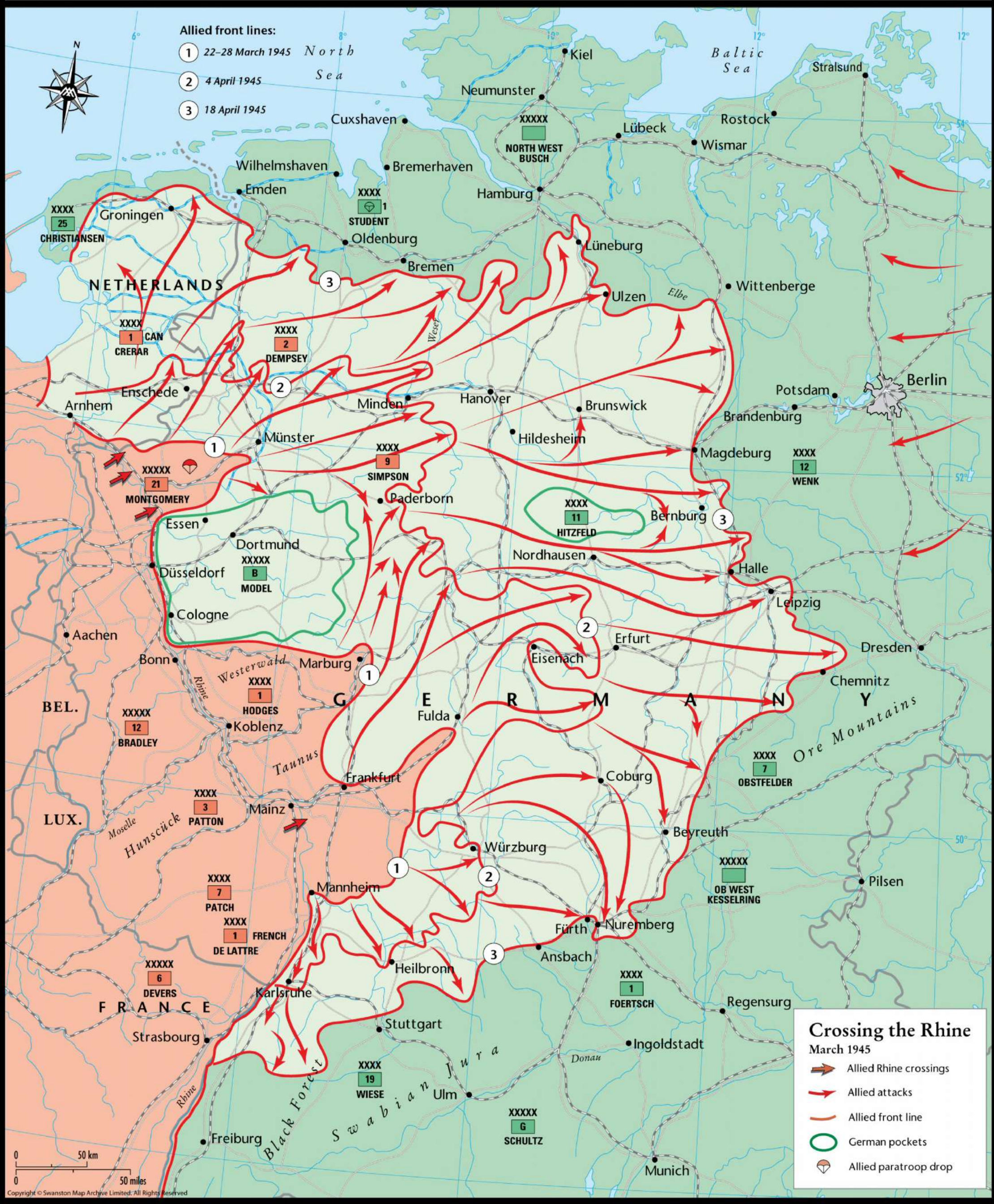
It's doubtful that Monty would have personally been aware of any dissension and he was quick to offer opinions on other commanders, a characteristic that didn't always endear him to his contemporaries. Nevertheless his tactical planning for the current operation had been approved and he would ensure that once his bridgehead was established on the east bank of the Rhine, there would be more than adequate resources and men available to hold it. The scale of this operation would make most previous Allied incentives pale by comparison.

An engineering effort

The sheer magnitude of this operation was unparalleled. It would initially entail assembling 59,000 Allied engineers for the transportation of material and supplies for Operation Plunder. British 30 Corps commander, the popular 49-year-old Lt. Gen. Sir Brian G. Horrocks, renowned for leading from the front, regarded Monty's overall plan for the offensive as "simplicity itself".

American troops cross the Rhine at St. Goar, under enemy fire

Source: Wiki / DVIC



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OPERATION VARSITY

Alongside the ground forces of Operation Plunder was the largest airborne assault in military history

The morning of 24 March was bright and sunny. Operation Varsity, the subsidiary assault of the historic Rhine crossing, was poised to bring in reinforcements for the Allied troops on the eastern bank. Standing on a hilltop behind Xanten with Field Marshal Alan Brooke, Prime Minister Churchill shouted excitedly, "They're here!" With a great roar overhead appeared 4,000 transport planes, tugs, and gliders of Maj. Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway's XVIII Airborne Corps. In the next ten minutes, more than 8,000 paratroopers of the British 6th and US 17th Airborne Divisions were dropped.

The paratroopers were dropped in close enough proximity to Allied ground units to avoid the endurance failures that squandered the British Airborne effort during Operation Market Garden. In total the operation employed 22,000 paratroopers and glider-borne forces in two-and-a-half hours, comprising two airborne divisions with airdropped artillery packages in support. The leading planes in the first of two waves released their payloads with minimum resistance, but it didn't take long for the German anti-aircraft batteries to respond. Some planes were towing two gliders simultaneously exceeding normal aircraft capacity and providing an easy target for the German gunners.

Ken Plowman was a British Horsa glider pilot who participated in Operation Varsity. He said, "We slowed to around 50 miles an hour and we agreed that we had to land. On the right was a copse and on the left was a German farmhouse. Between the two was a stream, must have been the River Issel. Des my co-pilot says 'shall we bounce it?'. So I pushed the stick forward, bounced on the ground, bounced up with the nose of the glider striking the bank of the stream and it broke off with both of us in it, rolled into the field doing about 40 or 50 miles an hour until it stopped. Then we hit our releases buckles and actually we were upside down so we fell on our heads. We had rolled about 300 yards into the field and as we ran back to the main body of the glider a Jeep emerged from it [and] sitting beside [the driver] is the captain and the sergeant major.

"This had all happened in the time that it had taken for the nose of the glider to roll and for us to get back to the main body of the glider. On the right there was a fellow with a Bren gun already deployed firing away at something, on the left there's another one. Anyone that tells me that in a battle they know where the shooting is coming from has got another thing coming because you can't tell the direction from where all the bullets are coming from. You hear the melee you hear the noise. It's just noise.

"YOU CAN'T TELL THE DIRECTION FROM WHERE ALL THE BULLETS ARE COMING FROM. YOU HEAR THE MELÉE YOU HEAR THE NOISE. IT'S JUST NOISE"

"The ramps had been put out, the Jeep comes slowly out, we clamber on, and there are men already on that Jeep and the trailer with tarpaulins. We grab onto this and drive on through the field. About 400 or 500 yards ahead there's a hedge with a gate. A figure emerged out of the hedge. Fortunately he didn't get shot, he was a chaplain of the Airborne Division who had the rank of general or captain or something. He scrambles on, we carry on down the lane and just at the end there's a military policeman with his red cap and white cuffs and white belt and he's conducting traffic.

"He puts his hands up and directs us to the left and we go up this road. We stopped eventually and got out and walked in file up this lane. There were people in gardens in slit trenches – they were the Volksturm, the home guard of the German army. They just put their hands up, they were frightened out of their lives. We separated from the captain and went to battalion headquarters. I was surprised there were only a few people there. We started to dig trenches around the building.

"About 10.00am the only drop of supplies was a 'liberator' drop. The squadron of liberators flew at roof level across the zone dropping canisters with parachutes attached. One flew straight into the ground and blew up a few hundred yards away. A self-propelled German gun had got range somewhere and he was firing shells that were exploding in the air, not hitting the ground. We got into the trenches and a German jet flew overhead. Later on after the supply drop my friend said we could grab a parachute to line the trench with. So we were in our parachute lined trench and then a few soldiers came through with the pilot of the jet that had been shot down.

"By that time the American element had arrived and set up a prisoner compound in the zone behind us so they marched the prisoner off to the compound. We got through the night, at about 10.00am on Sunday morning the first British tank arrived and it was over."

Montgomery had underestimated the ferocity of the German anti-aircraft defences. The paratroopers of the British 6th and US 17th Airborne Divisions found themselves caught in a deadly hail of bullets, and almost came off worse for wear. Despite the initial setbacks the two airborne divisions managed to seize the high ground around Wesel and successfully prevented enemy reinforcements from reaching the bridgeheads by gaining control of five bridges over the Issel River to the east of the Rhine. By dusk on the first day airborne troops had secured all of their objectives and linked up with the ground forces. German defenders were routed while Churchill observed the proceedings with great interest.

The city of Wesel, devastated by Allied bombing in preparation for the crossing of the Rhine

Source: Wiki / USAAF

American troops and anti-aircraft units at the Remagen Bridge over the Rhine River in Germany

© Alamy

Tanks crossing Rhine near Wesel, March 1945

Source: Wiki / US Army

Men of the 15th Scottish Division leave their assault craft after crossing the Rhine

Source: Wiki / Army Film & Photographic Unit

In preparation for deploying men and materiel for Operation Plunder, engineers and sappers constructed 12 bridges, together with complete railway bridges at Ravenstein and Mook in the Netherlands. Once a railhead and store depot was established near Goch the Allies could begin to assemble the 118,000 tons of supplies that were required including 30,000 tons of engineering, stores, bridging equipment, 25,000 wooden pontoons, 2,000 assault boats, 650 storm boats and 120 river tugs, together with 80 miles of balloon cable and 200 miles of steel wire rope. Allied engineers worked around the clock to construct over a 100 miles of road using 20,000 tons of stones, 20,000 logs, and 30,000 pickets, and 446 freight trains hauling 250,000 tons of equipment and supplies to the railheads and forward assembly lines.

To facilitate the logistical requirements, 60,000 Royal Engineers including navy personnel were also deployed. Thanks to the rafting and bridging operations that were prepared months in advance, the 21st Army Group could create a detailed but flexible traffic control plan that allowed for the swift and efficient movement of units across the river, while simultaneously allowing for flexibility as events transpired accordingly.

The plan may have been 'simplicity itself' but the preparations were orchestrated with sublime professionalism and expertise accumulated on the back of years of experience. There would be no margin for error this time. Monty had learned his lesson well.

All the preparations were conducted behind the veil of a chemically induced smokescreen that was initiated on 16 March and provided by a 'Smoke Control' unit made of four Pioneer Corps smoke companies. No fewer than 1,350 men operating 8,500 zinc chloride smoke generators, that expended around 450,000 gallons of 'fog'. This screen extended a full 66 miles along the west bank of the Rhine. The sole purpose of these dense coiling billows of blue and yellow smoke was to conceal the Allied build up from the Germans on the east bank of the River Rhine.

Preparations for Operation Plunder were conducted under tight security. Strict blackout regulations were enforced for the duration, and a story was contrived to coerce the enemy into thinking that the offensive would hit further north with the purpose of liberating the Netherlands as opposed to expanding east deeper into the Reich. Troops were forbidden to congregate unless under cover. Massed concentrations of vehicles, weapons, and ammunition were expertly camouflaged or concealed in farmyards, barns, and haystacks, and rubber dummies of tanks and artillery pieces were positioned along an imaginary battle line where they might attract the attention of enemy patrols.

When Monty got permission from Eisenhower to incorporate General Simpson's 9th Army into his ranks for Operation Plunder, it meant that Monty would get the services of the 23rd Headquarters Special Troops – a United States Army tactical deception unit officially also known as the 'Ghost Army'. Allied artillery guns were well dispersed and augmented by the addition of more than 600 rubber dummies provided by the 23rd.

Air, land and water

During the first three weeks of March, RAF and USAAF heavy and medium bombers dropped 31,635 tons of bombs on the transportation system within the Ruhr. The precursor to the actual Rhine crossing was a massive air bombardment on the German town of Wesel executed by RAF Lancasters and Mosquitos. 8th Air Force bombers and the 9th Tactical Air Command USAAF joined forces to eliminate virtually redundant German airfields, anti-aircraft sites and other positions that had the potential to interfere with navigating the Rhine.

By 23 March Monty had assembled a force of 250,000 troops along with a formidable collection of armour and specialised vehicles comprising of Churchill, Cromwell, Centaur, Comet, Valentine, and Sherman heavy and medium tanks; Bren gun carriers, Jeeps, half-tracks and armoured cars; amphibious Weasel, Buffalo, DUKW cargo and personnel carriers. Allied troops stood with their mouths agape as 50ft long, 15ft wide transporters lumbered past hauling assorted amphibious vehicles. They had been brought overland to the banks of the Rhine through Belgium and the Netherlands.

G Wing of 29th Armoured Division (also known as 'Hobart's Funnies') had been developing amphibious equipment and adapting tactical doctrine for the purpose of executing river crossings. With the following additions, General Hobart's command became the largest division in the British Army numbering 21,430 men. By January 1945 the British 33rd Armoured Brigade had renounced their Sherman tanks and were retraining with the amphibious Buffalo officially referred to as the LVT (Landing Vehicle Tracked). The Staffordshire Yeomanry and 44th Royal Tank Regiment under HQ 4th Armoured Brigade joined the division to retrain.

Monty was in a buoyant mood when he addressed his troops, "The enemy has been driven into a corner. Events are moving rapidly. The complete and decisive defeat of the Germans is certain: there is no possibility of doubt in this matter. 21 Army Group will now cross the Rhine. The enemy thinks he is safe behind this great river obstacle but we will show the enemy that he is far from safe behind it ... And having crossed the Rhine, we will crack about in the plains of Northern Germany, chasing the enemy from pillar to post ... May the 'Lord Mighty in Battle' give us the victory in this our latest undertaking as He has done in all our battles since we landed in Normandy."

During Operation Plunder the River Rhine spanned between 400 and 500 yards, at high tide this could rise to between 700 and 1,200 yards. The current was usually about

Prime Minister Winston Churchill, riding across the Rhine River in an amphibious vehicle

© Getty

3.5 knots (4 mph). The riverbed was sand and gravel conducive to using the amphibious Dual-Duplex tanks and trestles that would be able to get good purchase from the surface. The assembled brass, Montgomery, Dempsey and Horrocks, had particular faith in the power and effectiveness of the 25-pounder field gun. The general consensus of opinion was that the 25-pounder, or the Sexton self-propelled version, was one of the most decisive weapons of World War II. For Operation Plunder the British had assembled 1,300 artillery pieces and the Americans possessed around 500.

Three field gunner regiments possessing 72 guns each augmented every British infantry division. Their armoured divisions had two gunner regiments, one equipped with 48 self-propelled guns. The 3rd Army Group Royal Artillery (AGRA) had regiments fielding 4.5-inch and 5.5-inch medium guns. The few anti-tank regiments that hadn't been converted into armoured infantry would, along with the anti-aircraft regiments, be equipped with Bofors guns to fire directly and indirectly at the enemy. Masses of supplies, guns and ammunition congregated on the west bank of the Rhine.

British Commandos in converted American amphibious LVT-4 amphibious vehicles were going to be the first to navigate the river near Wesel. Under cover of an ensuing air strike the commandos would be followed by the 15th and 51st Scottish Divisions. The British Army had adopted these landing craft and renamed them as the Buffalo Mark IV for Operation Plunder. British 'Buffaloes' were issued to the 79th Armoured Division in northwest Europe where they had been instrumental in operations to clear the Scheldt estuary and open the port of Antwerp to Allied shipping (1944). These were augmented by 11 regiments of 'Hobart's Funnies' Maj. Gen. Sir Percy Hobart's unique collection of Churchill and Sherman tanks equipped with anti-mine flails, flamethrowers and bridging equipment that had proved invaluable during the Normandy campaign and the clearing of the inundated Scheldt Estuary.

On 23 March, at 5.00pm, 2,070 artillery pieces erupted simultaneously in an eardrum splitting cacophony that announced the opening of the Allied artillery barrages. They continued almost uninterrupted until 9.45am the following morning. The first crossings occurred relatively unimpeded during the night with British 30 Corps navigating the river, just to the north of Rees. British 12 Corps crossed opposite the town of Xanten. The British 1st Commando Brigade managed to get across to the partially destroyed town of Wesel where they faced a house-to-house fight with the German 180th Division among the ruins. Further south General Leland S. Hobbs's 30th Division and Major General Ira T. Wyche's 79th Division crossed the Rhine between Wesel and Walsum. By 9.45am, 24 March 1945, all the units earmarked to cross during that first phase had made it safely to the eastern bank of the River Rhine and faced little opposition.

King Kenny, Recon platoon, of the 823rd tank destroyer battalion later recalled, "I was attached to the U.S. 30th Infantry Division preparing to cross the Rhine a little further south. I remember when we crossed the Rhine we were to go in boats – not motorboats but boats with paddles. We were lined up on top of a hilly area with the river down in front of us. It was dark, night time. A bunch of guys were next to us and I looked over and saw their faces were blacked-up. They were sharp, a bunch of Canadian commandos.

"We got to the water and they had a boat for us. It was big and we rowed that thing until we hit land. Turned out there was an island in the middle of the river and it hadn't been plotted for us. We kept paddling the boat and finally pushed across to the other side but met no

"AN ATMOSPHERE OF DEFEATISM PERMEATED THE RANKS DURING THIS FINAL STAGE OF THE WAR. THEY KNEW FULL WELL THAT THEY WERE PLAYING THE END GAME"

A procession of German soldiers along the Rhine walking to a prison camp

resistance. We went forward for the next 24 hours and just kept moving. Later, General Simpson wrote a letter commending the Division (he once commanded) for its success in crossing the Rhine."

German resolve was badly shaken by the intensity of Allied artillery fire that ensued after weeks of aerial bombardment and an atmosphere of defeatism permeated the ranks during this final stage of the war. They knew full well that they were playing the end game. Consequently the Germans offered only minimal resistance and the Allies managed to secure extensive bridgeheads all along their front in a relatively short time.

The enemy, however, was quick to recover from the initial shock. As dawn broke of that beautiful spring morning in March 1945, the German high command determined they had accurately deciphered the nature of this Allied offensive and ordered General Heinrich Freiherr von Lüttwitz's 47th Panzerkorps to move to the south with General Major Siegfried von Waldenburg's 116th Panzerdivision and Generalleutnant Eberhardt Rodt's 15th Panzergrenadierdivision, but it was all to little avail. The Germans had been deceived into believing that the Allies would simultaneously orchestrate an airborne operation to coincide with their river crossing, probably landing well behind the German lines.

Operation Plunder may indeed have been a successfully executed military operation that was as inevitable as it was necessary, but the same cannot be said about Operation Varsity. The disproportionate number of casualties that the airborne troops incurred could have been due to the lack of Allied artillery support provided when they were dropped almost literally on top of the enemy positions. This tactic was extremely precarious but it facilitated a rapid linkup of ground forces with the paratroopers, and prevented German reinforcements from infiltrating the bridgeheads. Moreover the artillery preparation of the far bank was so intense and ultimately effective that at no given time during the operation did the forces crossing the Rhine request massive air support. Monty, it transpired, had learned his lesson from Operation Market Garden regarding dropping paratroopers in proximity to the objective.

He had succeeded in securing these bridgeheads on the east bank of the Rhine. He could again be as magnanimous in victory as he was dismissive in defeat, but the road ahead was far from clear. He had prepared well and committed significant time and effort to the training and rehearsals conducted by units of the 21st Army Group. His plan had depended on maintaining momentum for the duration and ensuring the Allies never lost the initiative throughout. It could be argued that he was over-prepared and over-provisioned for the whole operation, but that was Monty. It's undeniable that his resourceful use of naval amphibious landing craft to navigate the powerful Rhine currents guaranteed that the east bank would be reached safely and with minimum of disruption. Under the weight of this massive Allied incursion into the Third Reich, German resistance quickly crumbled and dissipated as expected.

On 27 March, Operation Plunder was officially declared a resounding success and by 28 March, Montgomery had his eyes fixed on Berlin. The only remaining barriers between him and Berlin would prove to be political rather than military and Monty was no politician.

© Getty

JAMES ALBERT NEWELL

Black Watch veteran

"After the Reichswald, we went to the Rhine [River] and we got ready there for the crossing of the Rhine [code-named Operation Plunder]. And on 23 March, again in these same Buffaloes, these tanks, we crossed the Rhine. That was 9.00am, I remember the time on the 23 March. And we immediately went into the attack. We were supposed to attack and take a village. We were told there was not many German soldiers in that area and it should be a pretty easy thing. Well, somebody was very wrong because when we got halfway across an open field, the German troops opened fire and we found out later that they were the First German [Parachute Army]. And we were just massacred. I was hit immediately with a bullet in the left thigh and I dropped and fortunately – just pure luck – I dropped into a small, like a recessed area about a foot deep, like a little ditch. And I think it was used for the running off of water.

"Anyway, I fell into it and I managed to put a first-aid dressing on my thigh and then I laid there. And I lay there all night and of course, those of my company who had survived, just had to go back leaving everybody there. I was told later that out of our company of 100 men, 60 were killed, 25 were wounded and 15 were unhurt. Now, that's what I was told. And I can believe it because as I lay there, every now and again, I glanced down behind me and there were bodies all over this field. We certainly lost a lot of men."

Men of the 1st Cheshire Regiment crossing the Rhine in Buffaloes at Wesel, 24 March 1945

Source: Wiki / British Government

DEFENDING THE RHINE

In late March 1945, the majestic River Rhine was Nazi Germany's last great defensive barrier in the west. But what did the Wehrmacht have left to defend Hitler's 'thousand year Reich'?

By mid-March 1945, the armies of the Allied powers had finally pushed the Wehrmacht back to the river Rhine. The once-mighty Westheer (German Army in the West) had shot its bolt in the failed winter offensives in the Ardennes, Alsace and the Vosges. The Soviet Vistula offensive, launched on 12 January, was lunging closer to Berlin and sucking in the lion's share of any last German reinforcements and reserves. Three German Heeresgruppen (Army Groups) were arrayed on the Western Front; H in the north, Walter Model's B in the Ruhr, and SS General Paul Hausser's G in the south.

The surprise capture of the Ludendorff bridge at Remagen in early March, and Patton's crossing of the Rhine at Oppenheim in the south, led German high command to believe the Ruhr would be the Allied objective, and so they concentrated the best of their remaining forces in Model's hands. In reality, Montgomery's crossing of the Rhine was planned to hit Johannes Blaskowitz's weakened Heeresgruppe H northwest of the Ruhr, at the towns of Wesel and Rees. Blaskowitz, a pugnacious old-school Prussian officer, had already been sacked twice during the war, the first time back in 1940 for protesting about atrocities against the Jews in occupied Poland. His performance in 1944 after the Allied invasion of France had been exemplary, and now, recalled once more, he arrived at his new command to find its two component armies; Alfred Schlemm's 1 Fallschirm-Armee (1st Parachute Army) and Günther Blumentritt's 25 Armee, woefully under-equipped and under-strength.

Blumentritt, Gerd von Rundstedt's ex-chief of staff, had the job of holding the Netherlands with four burnt-out divisions and a motley collection of Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine units spread across the country. To his south, Schlemm – a veteran of Crete and Russia – had fought a bitter rearguard battle amongst the serried pines of the Reichswald, losing half his men and the majority of his artillery in the process. His 70,000-strong command now nominally comprised six or so divisions and assorted flotsam and jetsam including so-called 'Magen' or 'stomach' battalions comprising men with severe intestinal ailments, supported by a smattering of artillery and fewer than 50 panzers and assault-guns.

Luftwaffe air support was non-existent, and there were no reserves to speak of. All the divisions were a fraction of their establishment, with Heinz Fiebig's 84 Infanterie-Division barely 4,000 men strong, and Bernhard Klosterkemper's 180 Infanterie-Division much the same, with its ranks filled with middle-aged reservists. One senior German officer described Schlemm's force as "a shadow of an army" that could "only pretend to resist".

Below: German fallschirmjägers armed with anti-aircraft guns like this multiple 20mm cannon, took a fearful toll of Allied paratroopers as they crossed the Rhine

Right: German troops wait for the next Allied attack. Their MG42 machine-gun was hated and feared by Allied troops

"HE WAS FORBIDDEN ON PAIN OF DEATH BY BERLIN FROM WITHDRAWING A SINGLE STEP OR LOSING AN INTACT BRIDGE ACROSS THE RHINE TO THE ALLIES"

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A highly-decorated German landser keeps watch on the Western Front. He is armed with a Panzerschreck

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German POWs gather during the final weeks of the war

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As for Schlemm himself, he was forbidden on pain of death by Berlin from withdrawing a single step, or losing an intact bridge across the Rhine to the Allies, and "as I had nine bridges in my sector I could see my hopes for a long life rapidly dwindle".

Understandably wary of Allied artillery and air power, Schlemm positioned relatively few men forward near the river itself, to act as an outpost 'tripwire' line, with his main forces dug-in further back. His main concern though was his almost total lack of mobility or reserves. With hardly any motorised transport his men had to use horse and cart or march on foot, so when the inevitable Allied attack came he would be unable to move his few troops to counter-attack. His only hope lay in accurately identifying where the landings would be so he could mass his men to face them. However, German intelligence was notoriously poor, and the para general was left to guess where the Anglo-Canadians might attack.

By March 1945 Nazi Germany was scraping the manpower barrel with teenagers like this young lad hurriedly drafted into the ranks

© Alamy

Early on Saturday morning, 24 March, after a tremendous artillery barrage, the British and American assault boats were launched across the Rhine. The German defenders – bombed and shelled into a stupor – seemingly had "no real fight in them" according to one young officer; with the two leading American divisions only suffering 31 casualties in total. As the troops disembarked and advanced east, resistance stiffened as the landsers (nickname for ordinary German soldier equivalent to the British Tommy) of the 84 and 180 caused problems with heavy machine-gun and mortar fire, even killing the commander of the British 51st (Highland) Infantry Division, Major-General Tom Rennie.

Schlemm's best troops: the paras of 7 and 8 Fallschirmjäger-Division, were to the north around the town of Rees, and had been hoping for some rest after being constantly in action since September the previous year. They weren't going to get it, as one of their number Adolf 'Adi' Strauch realised as Allied artillery forced him and his comrades into a cellar for cover. Their company commander appeared and ordered them up top to face the attacking British infantry, only for him to be shot dead as he led them out of the building.

One of Strauch's group fired a panzerfaust at the enemy and used the resulting explosion to make his getaway. Strauch and the others weren't as lucky and had no option but to throw down their weapons and raise their hands in surrender. To the south, Schlemm's LXIII Corps were effectively bypassed, and, unable to move, couldn't support Klosterkemper and Fiebig's beleaguered landsers.

Montgomery's final flourish was to drop the British 6th and the American 17th Airborne Divisions east of the river to further disrupt the German defences. However, as the Germans had shown at Arnhem the previous autumn, they had reacted to defeat in the air war in the west by massing anti-aircraft guns along the front to cover their troops, and in the days before the operation Allied intelligence had been forced to revise its estimates of German anti-aircraft strength upwards; with reports detailing the presence of over 800 German anti-aircraft guns. So, when the Allied air armada appeared overhead, the men of the Westheer were ready, and, with a tragic irony, the fallschirmjägers (German paratroopers) of Wolfgang Erdmann's 7 Fallschirmjäger-Division in particular, poured fire into the lumbering transports and the helpless parachutists as they drifted to earth. The two Allied divisions suffered over 3,000 casualties, and it took Allied burial parties two whole days to cut dead paratroopers out of trees in the landing zones.

Nevertheless, the men of the 6th and 17th Airborne fought back, and managed to capture the key villages of Hamminkeln and Schnappenberg, taking over 3,000 German prisoners and effectively annihilating 84 Infanterie-Division in the process.

Within three days Schlemm's 1 Fallschirm-Armee was in total disarray, having lost half its strength. The gateway to Germany was open.

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AA38110 Sopwith Camel F.1. D3326, Lt. Wilfred Reid 'Wop' May, RAF No.209 Squadron, Bertangles, France, 21st April 1918, Death of the Red Baron

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AA38310 Fokker Dr.I Triplane 161/17, Wolfram Freiherr von Richthofen, Jasta 11, JG.1, Cappy aerodrome, France, 21st April 1918, Death of the Red Baron

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Despite the unprecedented carnage, the Battle of Towton is little known in England today

THE 'TALL PRINCE'

Edward IV as he might have appeared at the Battle of Towton in 1461. Aged 18 and just proclaimed king, Edward was later described by Dominic Mancini, a visiting Italian to England, as having "a gentle nature and cheerful aspect: nevertheless should he assume an angry countenance he could appear very terrible to beholders".

At six feet, four inches tall, Edward was probably the tallest English king and towered over his contemporaries. Philippe de Commines described him as a "very good-looking, tall prince" while the *Croyland Chronicle* referred to him as "a person of most elegant appearance and remarkable beyond all others for the attractions of his person".

Edward's face is partially based on near-contemporary but mediocre portraits. Nevertheless, if the chronicles are to be believed the first Yorkist monarch was, at least in terms of appearance, the ideal Medieval king.

A 16th century portrait of Edward IV that now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery, London

Source: Wiki / Dcoetzee

Source: Wiki / LIFE Photo Archive

Illustration: Claudia Saraceni, The Art Agency

EDWARD IV
WARRIOR OF YORK

This military-minded monarch was a dominant force, winning the throne of England twice and crushing all who stood in his way. However, these battlefield triumphs have often been overshadowed in the complex history of the Wars of the Roses

WORDS: TOM GARNER

Apart from Henry V, Edward IV was the most successful commander of 15th century England. An imposing figure of great physical prowess, Edward won every battle he commanded and used his victories to become king of England not once, but twice. A ruthless, determined strategist, Edward survived every crisis that the Wars of the Roses threw at him and first won his crown as a teenager.

His career was remarkable but unlike Henry V, his controversial younger brother Richard III and his overbearing grandson Henry VIII, Edward is a somewhat neglected king. This is surprising because Edward's story is an extraordinary tale of huge battles, toxic politics and the unstoppable rise of a military protégé.

A kingdom in crisis

The origins of the Wars of the Roses (1455-87) were rooted in Henry VI's inability to rule. The son of the warrior king Henry V and grandson of Charles VI of France, Henry's regal standing was initially beyond question. Ascending to the throne aged just nine months old in 1422, Henry was an anointed and crowned king of both England and France during his youth. However, English rule in France had collapsed by the early 1450s, which was a huge humiliation.

In this moment of crisis, England needed a strong ruler but Henry had inherited a debilitating mental illness from Charles VI. He had a complete nervous breakdown in 1453 where "he had no natural sense nor reasoning power" for over a year. Henry was already known for his gentle nature and lack of interest in military affairs before his collapse but these qualities were incompatible for 15th century kingship. The vacuum created by his illness led to a power struggle for influence among his nobles, which was led most prominently by Richard, 3rd Duke of York.

A powerful magnate who had served as both lieutenant of France and Ireland, York was the second wealthiest man in England after the king and had a strong claim to the throne. A great-grandson of Edward III, York's claim was based on both sides of his family and he acted as Lord Protector of England during Henry's incapacity.

Initially loyal to Henry VI, York gradually turned against the king after his recovery and the birth of his heir Edward of Westminster, Prince of Wales. Henry deprived York of his status as protector and restored his rivals to favour. York collaborated with Richard Neville, 16th Earl of Warwick, to restore his protectorship and the resulting First Battle of St Albans in May 1455 began what became known as the 'Wars of the Roses'.

"THE LANCASTRIANS PLACED A PAPER CROWN ON YORK'S DECAPITATED HEAD BEFORE IT WAS SYMBOLICALLY STUCK ON MICKLEGATE BAR"

Henry was captured at St Albans and York was returned to power. Political battle lines were slowly drawn during 1456-59 between York and Henry's consort Queen Margaret of Anjou. This was the genesis of the 'Yorkist' and 'Lancastrian' factions and it was into this toxic atmosphere that York's eldest son Edward, Earl of March emerged.

The ascent of March

Born in Rouen in 1442, little is known of Edward's childhood although it is likely that he partially grew up at the Yorkist stronghold of Ludlow Castle in Shropshire.

He would have received a military upbringing that befitted his rank and his first experience of combat was at the Battle of Ludford Bridge in October 1459. By now, Margaret had accused York of intending to supplant Henry VI. Warfare broke out but the Yorkists were defeated at Ludford. York fled to Ireland while the young Edward accompanied Warwick to Calais.

Warwick proceeded to daringly steal a Lancastrian fleet at Sandwich, Kent, before he and Edward invaded England and entered London. Henry VI's army was in the Midlands and took up a defensive position at Northampton. Warwick and Edward marched to negotiate with Henry but the Yorkist overtures were rebuffed by the duke of Buckingham. During the battle that followed, rainfall neutralised the Lancastrian artillery while Lord Grey of Ruthin defected to the Yorkists. Buckingham was killed and Henry was captured in his tent by an archer.

Northampton was Edward's first battlefield victory although it was shared with Warwick. In its aftermath, York returned from Ireland and became protector once more. He also forced Henry to recognise him as heir apparent during the king's lifetime, which rose Edward's own standing. However, Margaret of Anjou escaped to Scotland and refused to recognise her husband's humiliation and Prince Edward's disinheritance.

The Lancastrians gathered forces in the north of England while the Yorkists were split. Edward was raising reinforcements on the Welsh border while his father led an army

northwards from London. This force arrived at Wakefield with York basing himself inside Sandal Castle. The Lancastrians lured the Yorkists out of the fortress and into battle where they were "caught like a fish unto a net". Thousands were killed, including York and his younger son Edmund, Earl of Rutland. For his pretensions towards the throne, the Lancastrians placed a paper crown on York's decapitated head before it was symbolically stuck on Micklegate Bar in the city of York.

Seizing the crown

For Edward, his father's and brother's deaths were a personal and dynastic calamity. The Yorkists held London under Warwick but Edward now had to prevent Lancastrian forces from Wales advancing into England and block their linkup with the main Lancastrian army. Now the duke of York, Edward marched with 5,000 men and positioned his troops at Mortimer's Cross, Herefordshire on 2 February 1461.

Positioning his archers to guard fords and a bridge, Edward's troops were attacked by the Lancastrians. The battle became a slogging match where the Lancastrians pushed back the Yorkist right flank but Edward's archers inflicted considerable losses. Edward commanded his troops in person and the Lancastrians were forced into a rout.

One of their commanders, Owen Tudor, was captured and executed although his grandson would eventually establish the Tudor dynasty as Henry VII.

Edward had won his first victory in sole command aged only 18. However, his success meant that Warwick had to face Margaret's main Lancastrian army alone at the Second Battle of St Albans on 16 February 1461. The Yorkists were defeated and Henry VI was freed from their custody. The Lancastrian path to London was also wide open as Warwick extricated his troops and marched to meet Edward in the Cotswolds.

Margaret did not take advantage of the Lancastrian victory and hesitated when she heard of Edward's success at Mortimer's Cross. The Lancastrian commanders considered that it was inadvisable to make for London when Edward's army remained undefeated. It was this twist of fate that enabled Edward and Warwick to triumphantly enter the capital unopposed on 26 February.

"KING EDWARD SO GLORIOUSLY COMFORTED HIS MEN, REFRESHING THE WEARY, AND HELPING THE WOUNDED"

Londoners reputedly received Edward rapturously and his symbol of the White Rose was hailed in a popular verse, "Let us now walk in a new vineyard, and let us make a gay garden in the month of March with this fair white rose and herb, the Earl of March."

The political situation clearly favoured the Yorkists and to demonstrate his martial prowess, Edward held a military review of his troops on 2 March 1461 at Clerkenwell.

Two days later, the teenage commander was "sworn afore the bishop of Canterbury and the Chancellor of England and the lords that he should truly and justly keep the realm and the laws thereof maintain as a true and a just king". The former earl and duke was now Edward IV of England although there was no time for a coronation. To hastily make his accession official, Edward wore the robes and cap of state as well as ceremonially sitting on the King's Bench. The reason for these hurried rituals was that Henry VI was still alive and his Lancastrian armies would not submit to the new monarch without a titanic struggle.

Showdown at Towton

Edward's proclamation as king heralded the beginning of a fledgling, Yorkist dynasty but his position was extremely insecure. In a historic irony, he was just as much a usurper as the first Lancastrian king – Henry IV – had been when he deposed Richard II in 1399. Within days of his accession, the royal Lancastrian party were sending out letters to resist Edward's rule. One knight, Sir William Plumpton, was ordered to raise "all such people as ye may make defensibly arrayed" and to "come to us in all haste possible to resist the malicious intent and purpose of our said traitor [Edward IV]".

The bulk of the Lancastrian army was in the north of England and Edward marched the Yorkists to Pontefract to collect support. The Lancastrians were based at York with possibly as many as 30,000 men. Edward gathered approximately 25,000 men and some of the opposing forces clashed indecisively at Ferrybridge, Yorkshire on 28 March 1461.

The two main armies faced each other the following day with the Lancastrians positioning themselves on Towton ridge. Edward and his army arranged themselves on a smaller ridge with the village of Saxton behind them while heavy snow began to fall. The wind picked up in the Yorkists' favour as the Lancastrian archers'

VICTORIES OF THE WHITE ROSE

Edward IV won all six of the battles that he commanded in locations across England from Yorkshire and the Midlands to the Home Counties

arrows fell short of the enemy positions. The Yorkists were even able to pick up the fallen arrows and use the favourable wind to loose them back into the enemy.

The Lancastrian vanguard then advanced forward and killed many of the Yorkist archers. A great slogging match ensued in the snow with the Tudor historian Edward Hall writing, "This battle was sore fought, for the taking of prisoners was proclaimed as a great offence, by reason whereof every man determined either to conquer or to die in the field. This bloody conflict continued for hours in doubtful victory."

The Yorkists were finally relieved by late reinforcements supplied by the duke of Norfolk, which caused the Lancastrians to retreat. Hall relayed that it was Edward who had kept his men together, "King Edward so gloriously comforted his men, refreshing the weary, and helping the wounded, that the [Lancastrians] were discomfited and overcome and fled towards Tadcaster bridge to save themselves."

The Lancastrian retreat turned into a rout and many were drowned trying to cross the nearby River Cock. The Yorkists pursued them relentlessly although Edward later claimed to the diplomat Philippe de Commines, "In all the battles he had won, as soon as he sensed victory, he mounted his horse and shouted to his men that they must spare the common soldiers and kill the lords, of whom few or none escaped." According to Hall, Edward was at least partially lying, "He made proclamation that no prisoner should be taken, nor one enemy saved."

Whatever the truth, Edward had achieved a decisive victory – and an unprecedented bloodbath. As many as 28,000 soldiers were killed, the majority of them Lancastrian, which made Towton the costliest battle ever fought on English soil. With possibly one tenth of all eligible English and Welshmen fighting on the battlefield out of a population of three million, this was a national catastrophe. The bishop of Salisbury described the casualties as "a number unheard of in our realm for almost a thousand years" while the shocked writer of *Gregory's Chronicle* ended his listing of the dead with the words, "Jesus be thou merciful unto their souls. Amen."

Writing decades later, Hall lamented the brutality of Towton, "This conflict was in manner unnatural for in it the son fought against the father, the brother against the brother … and the tenant against his lord, which slaughter did much weaken the puissance [strength] of this realm, considering that these dead men had force enough to resist the greatest princes of all Europe."

Wrath of the Kingmaker

The Lancastrian defeat was total and Henry VI, Margaret and Prince Edward – who waited at York during the battle – fled to Scotland. Edward IV was now accepted as king although Henry remained at large for several years. The former monarch re-entered northern England and stayed in safe houses before several Lancastrian defeats led to his capture in July 1465. Edward held Henry in strict but honourable captivity in the Tower of London but his greatest threat came from his closest ally.

Warwick had been Edward's trusted supporter and fought alongside him from Ludford Bridge to Towton but when the king secretly married the relatively low-born Elizabeth Woodville, the earl was greatly offended. The new queen's extended family

Source: Wiki / National Portrait Gallery

Henry VI's weak rule directly led to the Wars of the Roses although he was not a complete failure as king. A great champion of education, Henry founded Eton College and King's College, Cambridge

Source: Wiki / Mathsci

Edward IV's most persistent opponent was Henry VI's consort Queen Margaret of Anjou who tenaciously fought to defend her husband's throne and her son's inheritance

THE SUN IN SPLENDOUR

A strange solar sight raised Yorkist morale at the Battle of Mortimer's Cross and became part of Edward IV's heraldic insignia

On the morning of 2 February 1461, a Yorkist army of 5,000 men commanded by Edward (who was then duke of York) intercepted a Lancastrian force led by Owen Tudor and the earls of Pembroke and Wiltshire. The two armies met at Mortimer's Cross in Herefordshire with the Yorkists slightly outnumbering the Lancastrians.

As dawn broke before the battle started a meteorological phenomenon known was a 'parhelion' occurred. A parhelion is an atmospheric optical illusion that consists of a bright spot to one or both sides of the sun. This often creates two 'sun dogs' that flank the sun at an angle of 22 degrees.

The Yorkist troops were reputedly alarmed at the sight of three suns but Edward thought it represented the Holy Trinity and saw it as an omen of success. When the Lancastrians were subsequently defeated Edward adopted 'The Sun in Splendour' as his personal badge. The heraldic use of the sun traditionally depicted a human face but Edward may have combined the sun with the White Rose of York.

Parhelions most commonly appear during the winter in the middle latitudes

Source: Wiki / USFWS Mountain-Prairie

William Shakespeare later immortalised this event in his play *Henry VI, Part III* where Edward has a fictional conversation about the parhelion with his younger brother Richard, "Dazzle mine eyes, or do I see three suns? 'Tis wondrous strange, the like yet never heard of. I think it cites us, brother, to the field … Whate'er it bodes, henceforward will I bear, upon my target three fair-shining suns."

gradually dominated Edward's court and Warwick's influence diminished. He eventually rebelled against Edward in 1469 and took him prisoner after defeating a Yorkist force commanded by the earls of Pembroke and Devon at Edgecote Moor in July 1469. The king was released within months but another failed rebellion in early 1470 forced Warwick to flee to France.

In a remarkable volte-face, Warwick sided with the exiled Margaret and re-invaded England in September 1470. Lancastrian support gathered pace and Edward was forced to flee to the Low Countries when he heard of Warwick's defection. Henry VI was then released from the Tower and restored as king on 3 October 1470. This was Warwick's second act as kingmaker and Henry's restoration was known as the 'Readeption'. Despite this unprecedented event, the Lancastrian king was a diminished figure. He emerged from captivity "as a man amazed, dulled with troubles and adversities" and that he was "not so cleanly kept as such should seem a prince".

Nevertheless, in the powerful hands of Warwick, Henry was seemingly secure on his restored throne. For Edward, the loss of his kingdom should have been a mortal blow and continental politicians assumed that he could not recover. As the Milanese ambassador to France, Sforza de Bettini, wryly noted, "It is a difficult matter to go out by the door and then want to enter by the windows."

Bettini had not reckoned on Edward's determination. He secured the reluctant support of the duke of Burgundy and returned to England in March 1471. Edward landed at Ravenspur, Yorkshire, and gathered 2,000 men before marching south. Support for the Yorkists grew to such an extent that Edward entered London unopposed on 3 April. Henry VI was once again a prisoner and this time Edward took his royal rival with him on campaign when he marched to deal with Warwick's Lancastrian army.

"HE 'MANLY, VIGOROUSLY AND VALIANTLY ASSAILED' HIS ENEMIES AND 'WITH GREAT VIOLENCE BEAT AND BORE DOWN AFORE HIM ALL THAT STOOD IN HIS WAY'"

"Great violence"

Despite Edward's momentum, Warwick had an advantage in that he was waiting for Margaret to arrive with military aid. If the numerically inferior Edward could be defeated, then the Lancastrian position might still be secured. In the event, the weather played a decisive part when the former allies clashed at Barnet, Hertfordshire, on 14 April 1471.

The opposing forces had first encountered each other the previous night with Warwick ineffectively bombarding the Yorkists with artillery. Fog then descended on the battlefield overnight, which confused both armies. Edward's brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, made progress against the duke of Exeter but found himself outflanked in the mist. Meanwhile, the earl of Oxford was mistakenly attacked by fellow Lancastrian archers who mistook the star on his banner for Edward's sign of the sun. This led to panic among Oxford's men who cried "Treason!" and the Lancastrians retreated in confusion. During this chaotic melee Edward fought in the centre with characteristic courage although like many others he could "see but a little from him" because of the fog. Nevertheless, he "manly, vigorously and valiantly assailed" his enemies and "with great violence beat and bore down afore him all that stood in his way".

With the battle having turned in the Yorkists' favour, Warwick took to his horse and fled but he was overtaken by less heavily armed men and killed. The man who had done most to put Edward on the throne was stripped of his armour and his body was displayed for three days at St Paul's Cathedral, London, to prove that the Kingmaker was dead.

Edward was again victorious and the political situation had flipped once more but the Lancastrian threat was not eliminated. Margaret and Prince Edward landed at Weymouth, Dorset, on the same day as the Battle of Barnet and continental observers began to pity England for its continuous upheaval. The weary Ambassador Bettini wrote, "I wish the country and the people were plunged deep into the sea, because of their lack of stability, for I feel like one going to the torture when I write about them, and no one ever hears twice alike about English affairs."

The Battle of Tewkesbury

Margaret and Prince Edward lost no time in gathering an army in southwest England and made requests to supporters "for all such fellowship as you can make in your most defensible array" against "Edward, Earl of March, the King's great Rebel our Enemy".

King Edward had disbanded his army shortly after Barnet and imprisoned Henry VI back in the Tower. He soon set about raising a new

Despite his reputation as one of the most influential noblemen of 15th century England, Warwick the Kingmaker was most likely killed by soldiers after being de-horsed at Barnet

Source: Wiki / LIFE Photo Archive

A near-contemporary Flemish depiction of the Battle of Barnet. Edward is inaccurately shown killing Warwick the Kingmaker with a lance

Source: Wiki / Ghent University library

SANCTIONED FRATRICIDE

Edward IV ordered the execution of his own brother during his second reign, a shocking event that has largely escaped condemnation

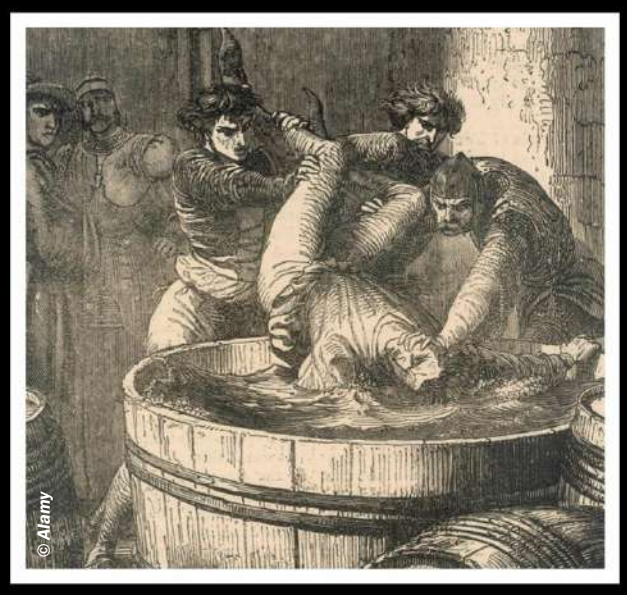
Richard III's infamy rests on his usurping the throne from his infant nephew Edward V and likely ordering his subsequent murder in the Tower of London along with his younger brother Richard of Shrewsbury, Duke of York. Richard's exact motives or whether he was even responsible for the crime have never been conclusively proven but the circumstances secured his posthumous villainy. By contrast, Edward IV's reputation has remained relatively unblemished despite the fact that he conclusively ordered the death of his (and Richard's) brother George, Duke of Clarence.

Clarence was a treacherous character who had supported Edward's claim to the throne before defecting to the Lancastrians in 1470 with his father-in-law Warwick the Kingmaker. He soon reconciled with Edward and even fought alongside him at the battles of Barnet and Tewkesbury.

Despite his treason, Clarence was returned to favour and became wealthy under Edward's restored rule. Nevertheless, after a series of controversies and disputes he left the court after the king refused to let him marry the rich duchess of Burgundy. Clarence was implicated in a scheme that wished Edward's death and he was imprisoned in the Tower of London.

In early 1478, Parliament was summoned to conduct a stage-managed trial of Clarence. He was sentenced to death with the Bill of Attainder being personally signed by Edward. It is unclear how guilty of treason Clarence actually was but the king certainly led the prosecution of his own brother. On 18 February 1478, Clarence was privately executed in the Tower. He was reputedly drowned in a butt of Malmsey wine but Edward later bewailed his death. Nevertheless, he set a precedent for Yorkist family murders that ultimately caused the dynasty to implode.

Clarence's rumoured execution by drowning in a butt of wine was an unusual punishment even in Medieval England



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Henry VI (seated on a white horse) is taken by Edward IV to Barnet to prevent the Lancastrians from retaking their king

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A vengeful Edward IV pursues defeated Lancastrian leaders into Tewkesbury Abbey in an 1867 painting

© Alamy

force after hearing news of the Lancastrian landing and conducted a lightning march to prevent Margaret crossing the River Severn at Gloucester. Margaret's force, which was commanded by the duke of Somerset, was attempting to link up with Lancastrian troops in Wales but it was forced to push north while Edward's army followed in hot pursuit.

On 14 May 1471, the almost evenly-matched armies fought at Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire. Edward once again commanded the Yorkist centre and used hidden spearmen to assist his brother Richard, Duke of Gloucester, when Somerset attempted a flanking manoeuvre. Another Lancastrian commander, Lord Wenlock, did not attack at the same time as Somerset, which resulted in fierce fighting. Somerset swiftly retreated and accused Wenlock of treachery before he personally killed him.

Wenlock's indecision cost the Lancastrians the battle and a rout ensued, particularly in an area which became known as the 'Bloody Meadow'. Prince Edward was killed while their leading commanders, including Somerset, took sanctuary in Tewkesbury Abbey. A vengeful Edward forced the Lancastrian leaders out of the abbey after two days before they were executed. Margaret was captured with Edward returning with her in triumph to London on 21 May 1471. That same night, Henry VI was murdered in the Tower, which completely extinguished the direct Lancastrian line. Margaret remained a prisoner in England until 1475 when she was ransomed by Louis XI of France and she spent the rest of her life in exile.

"WHILE THE KINGDOM SETTLED INTO COMPARATIVE PEACE THE KING GOVERNED STRONGLY BUT FELL INTO A LICENTIOUS LIFESTYLE OF GLUTTONY AND WOMANISING"

A short-lived dynasty

Edward's victory was complete and for the rest of his reign the Yorkist control over England was total. While the kingdom settled into comparative peace the king governed strongly but fell into a licentious lifestyle of gluttony and womanising. When he died of a short illness on 9 April 1483 he was only 40 years old and his excesses had likely contributed to his death.

Edward's fatal hedonism had dire consequences for his dynasty. His eldest son and heir, Edward V, was just 12 years old when he was proclaimed king and only reigned for a few months before he was deposed by his uncle – and supposed protector – Gloucester on 25 June 1483. Edward V, along with his younger brother, disappeared into the Tower of London while Gloucester became King Richard III. The new monarch reigned briefly and unstably before he was killed at the Battle of Bosworth in August 1485. Richard III's death directly led to the establishment of the Tudor dynasty and undid all that his elder brother had fought for.

Edward IV had won his throne twice by force only for his dynasty to collapse in just over two years. He would not have known this at his death but his failure to plan for the Yorkists' continued dominance overshadowed his almost unrivalled military achievements. In this context, Edward has an ambiguous place in English history as an overwhelming success and a posthumous failure.

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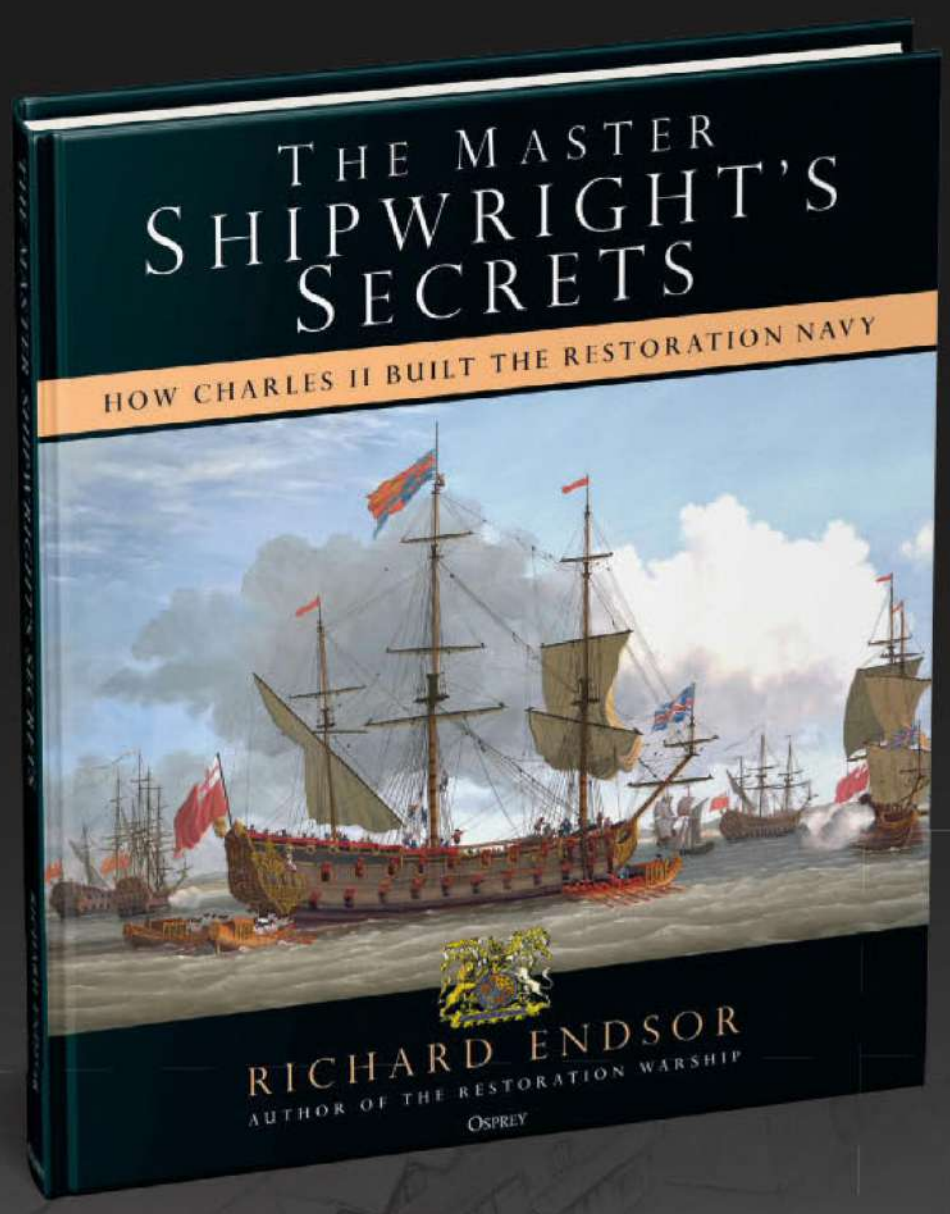

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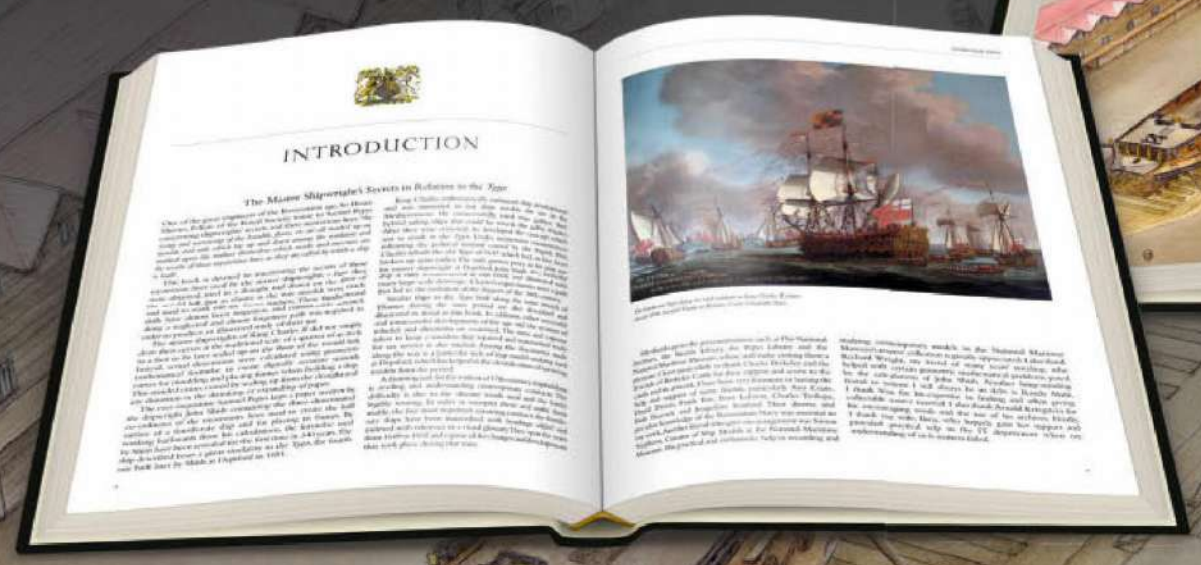

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Heroes of the Medal of Honor

DANIEL E. SICKLES

This major general lost a leg, led the Union III Corps, Army of the Potomac, to near ruin at Gettysburg, and years later received his nation's highest honour

WORDS **MICHAEL E. HASKEW**

The Confederate cannon were already unlimbering, and soon the chilling "Yip! Yip!" of the rebel yell would be heard above the din of battle.

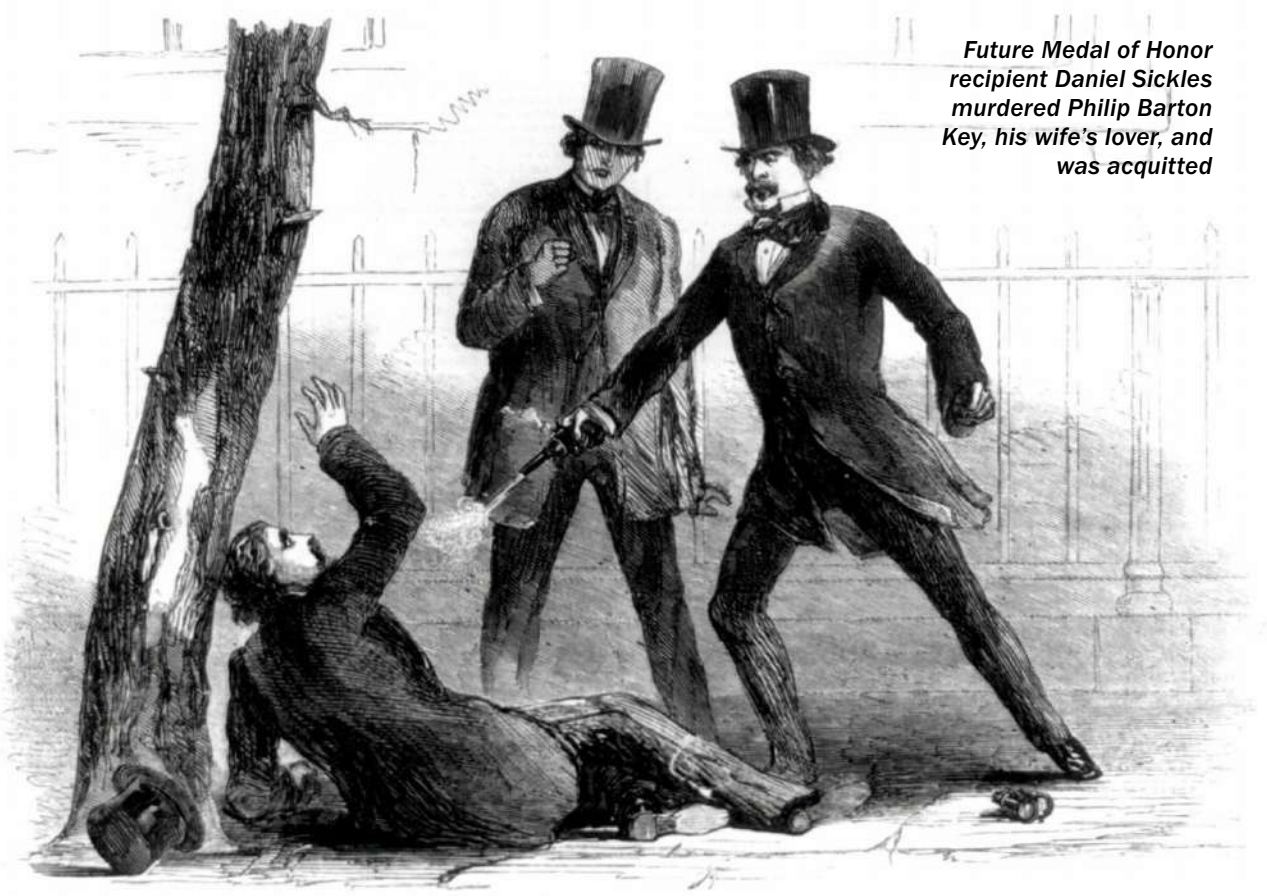
On 2 July 1863, the outcome of the Battle of Gettysburg, the turning point of the American Civil War, hung in the balance. Although neither Major General George G. Meade, commander of the Union Army of the Potomac, nor Lieutenant General Robert E. Lee, the revered leader of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, had intended to fight near the small town in southern Pennsylvania, the death struggle was in its second day.

After nearly suffering a catastrophic defeat on the first day, Meade had deployed his army on favourable ground, in the shape of a fish hook, which would afford him the advantage of interior lines – the ability to shift reinforcements to threatened areas quickly – and awaited renewed attacks from Lee's Rebels. The Union line stretched north to south from the crook of Culp's Hill and Cemetery Hill across Cemetery Ridge to its southern anchor, a conspicuous promontory known locally as Little Round Top.

In assuming the defensive, Meade had ordered Major General Daniel Sickles to position his III Corps, including the two divisions of Major General David Birney and Brigadier General Andrew A. Humphreys, in the southern portion of the fish hook line, forming a junction with Major General Winfield Scott Hancock's II Corps to the north along Cemetery Ridge and occupying Little Round Top if practicable. Sickles complied with the order, posting the six brigades of infantry and five supporting artillery batteries along the low ridge, but he was troubled.

To Sickles's front higher ground was visible surrounding a peach orchard just west of the prosperous farmhouse of Abraham Trostle. Sickles believed that his current position would be vulnerable to enemy artillery if the Rebels occupied the peach orchard and was concerned that Pitzer's Woods, directly to his front, was so thick with summer foliage that attacking enemy troops might be thoroughly obscured until they were on top of his lines. He decided that the proper course of action was to advance III Corps approximately three-quarters of a mile to the peach orchard vicinity along the Emmitsburg Road, where his troops could command the higher ground.

Seeking approval late on the morning of 2 July, Sickles found General Meade and asked

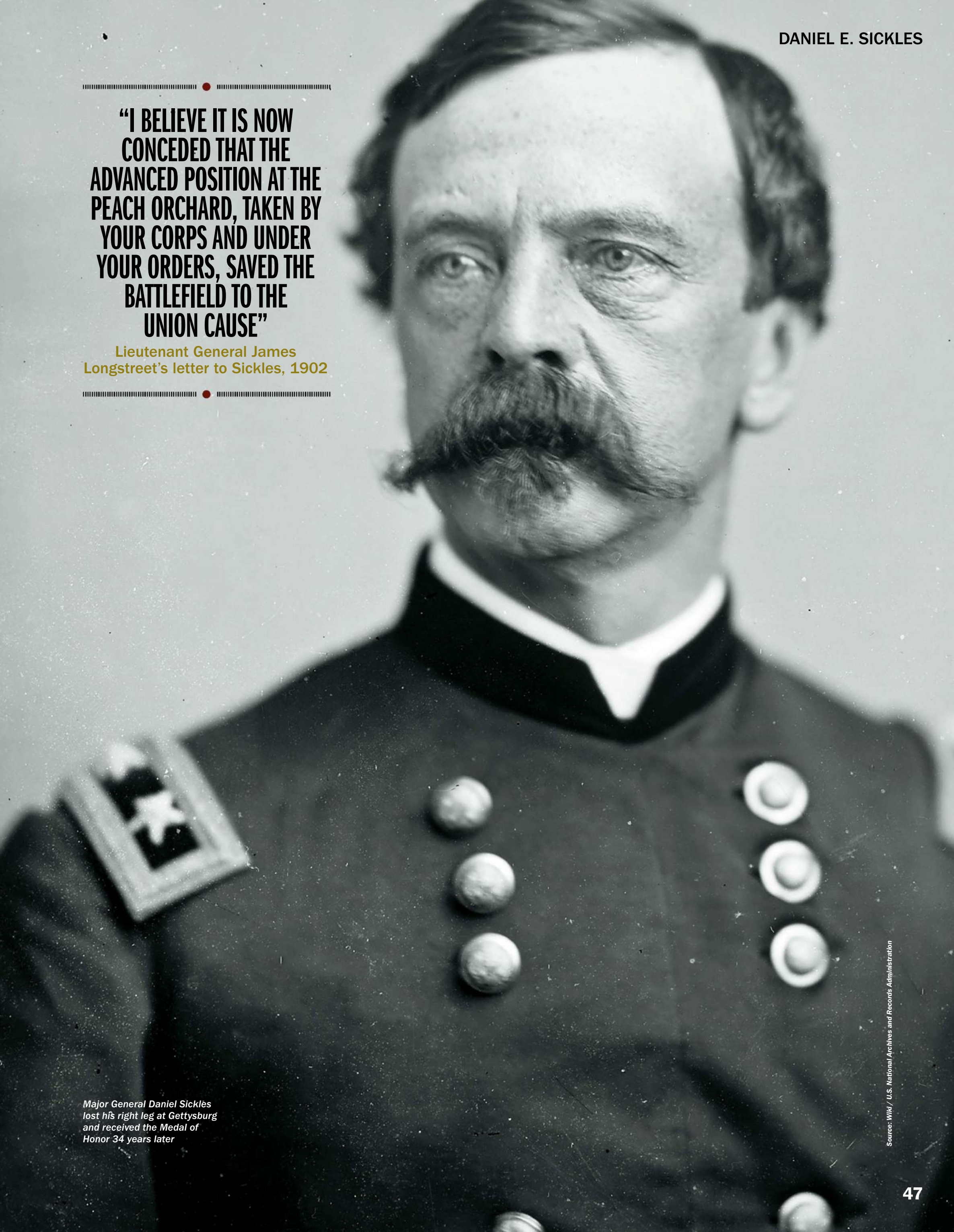


Future Medal of Honor recipient Daniel Sickles murdered Philip Barton Key, his wife's lover, and was acquitted

Source: Wiki / Library of Congress

"I BELIEVE IT IS NOW CONCEDED THAT THE ADVANCED POSITION AT THE PEACH ORCHARD, TAKEN BY YOUR CORPS AND UNDER YOUR ORDERS, SAVED THE BATTLEFIELD TO THE UNION CAUSE"

Lieutenant General James Longstreet's letter to Sickles, 1902



Major General Daniel Sickles lost his right leg at Gettysburg and received the Medal of Honor 34 years later

Source: Wiki / U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

Major General Daniel Sickles

Source: Wiki / Library of Congress

The monument at the Peach Orchard at Gettysburg, where Daniel Sickles was seriously wounded on 2 July 1863

Source: Wiki / Veggies

Former General Daniel Sickles attends a reunion of Confederate and Union soldiers in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

he thought best. Meade was affirmative but preoccupied with troop dispositions along the northern portion of the Union line and declined to ride with Sickles and view the ground himself. Sickles then appealed to Brigadier General Henry Hunt, Army of the Potomac Chief of Artillery, who agreed with the movement in principle but refused to issue an order stating bluntly, "Not on my authority."

Hunt pointed out the disadvantages of the movement, principally that the III Corps with fewer than 11,000 men could not adequately cover the greater distance in the Union line. Sickles, however, was further alarmed when Colonel Hiram Berdan, leading 300 troops of the United States Sharpshooters, reported large numbers of Confederate soldiers in Pitzer's Woods. Just after 2.00pm, the III Corps commander ordered Birney forward on the left and Humphreys on the right along the Emmitsburg Road, forming a V-shaped position that would become known to history as Sickles's Salient.

"DAN SICKLES, IN NOT OBEYING MEADE'S EXPLICIT ORDERS, RISKED BOTH HIS THIRD CORPS AND THE ARMY'S DEFENSIVE PLAN ON JULY 2"

Historian and author Stephen W. Sears

Although he did have military experience prior to the Civil War, Sickles was essentially a political general who failed to grasp the tactical picture entirely, and the movement was similar to another at the Battle of Chancellorsville two months earlier that nearly led to disaster there. Ironically, the ill-advised move would lead to his receiving the Medal of Honor 34 years later at the age of 75.

Throughout his life, he was no stranger to controversy, and describing him as 'colourful' is a tremendous understatement. On 27 February 1859, Sickles had shot to death his wife's lover, attorney Philip Barton Key, in broad daylight before witnesses in LaFayette Park, Washington, DC. Key was the son of Francis Scott Key, who wrote the lyrics of the *Star Spangled Banner*, the American national anthem. Imprisoned and tried for murder, he was acquitted, the first to successfully employ the 'temporary insanity' defence in the U.S..

Serving as an officer of New York militia in the 1850s, Sickles had personally raised the Excelsior Brigade for service with the Union Army at the outbreak of the Civil War. Known as a hard drinker and womaniser, he served in the U.S. Congress and was censured for inappropriate conduct. After the war he was appointed Minister to Spain and served as sheriff of New York County. He worked to establish Gettysburg National Military Park and attended reunions there. He served many years as chairman of the New York Monuments

Source: Wiki / Library of Congress

Commission, but was removed under suspicion of embezzlement.

At Gettysburg, the formation of Sickles' salient resulted in III Corps losing contact with II Corps to the north. This left the Corps isolated while making it vulnerable to attack from two sides. It also left the critical high ground of Little Round Top unoccupied.

Meade finally rode up at about 3.00pm and was livid at Sickles for making the move without orders. When Sickles offered to return to his original position, Meade declined and noted that he would send reinforcements to shore up the precarious deployment. About an hour later, just as the meeting broke up, Confederate artillery roared to life. Lieutenant General James Longstreet unleashed his I Corps, Army of Northern Virginia, as three brigades of Major General LaFayette McLaws's division bowled into the exposed Union line. This sent it reeling through the peach orchard and a wheat field.

Sickles rode behind the cover of the Trostle barn, but a fragment from a Rebel artillery shell shattered his right leg. Witnesses remember the general calmly leaning forward and pulling the leg across his saddle. Moments later, he was laid on a stretcher with tourniquets applied to the mangled leg, which was amputated later that day. Sickles received a draught of brandy and was seen calmly puffing on a cigar as he was carried to a hospital tent. After recovering, he donated the amputated limb to the Army Medical Museum in Washington, DC, and was reported to have visited it annually on the anniversary of the battle.

The reinforcements sent by Meade did stem the Confederate tide, and quick thinking by Brigadier General Gouverneur Kemble prevented Little Round Top from falling into Rebel hands. Disaster, largely of Sickles's own making, had narrowly been averted, but III Corps had lost nearly 4,200 men – roughly 40 per cent of its strength.

Nevertheless, Sickles spent the next half century claiming that he had been responsible for the victory at Gettysburg, the III Corps' movement blunting the coming Confederate attack and dooming it to failure. In doing so, he impugned Meade's conduct of the battle as well.

On 30 October 1897, Sickles received the Medal of Honor for his bravery in the salient on 2 July 1863. His brief citation read, "… Major General Sickles displayed most conspicuous gallantry on the field vigorously contesting the advance of the enemy and continuing to encourage his troops after being himself severely wounded."

Although his valour is likely beyond question, the citation of the Medal of Honor has been the subject of debate. Between 1891 and 1897, more than 500 Medals of Honor were received for actions during the Civil War, and the presentation to Sickles occurred weeks after President William McKinley had authorised restrictive changes in the criteria for the medal on 26 June 1897.

Sickles was well connected politically, and probably some measure of influence was exerted in the process. Sickles died in New York City of a brain haemorrhage on 3 May 1914 at the age of 94. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

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BOLESLAW THE BRAVE

This warrior king forged Poland into a major European power through wars of conquest against Germans, Russians and Slavs

WORDS **WILLIAM WELSH**

An army of armoured knights from Poland, Saxony and Bohemia, supported by Pecheneg horse archers, arrived on the banks of the Western Bug River in Red Ruthenia on 23 July 1018. The army, under the leadership of Duke Boleslaw I Chrobry, was en route to the metropolis of Kiev to secure the city for Boleslaw's son-in-law Prince Sviatopolk, who had been dethroned two years earlier.

After they stopped for the day, Boleslaw ordered his knights to hunt game and have their servants prepare a feast to boost the morale of his troops before they went to battle against Sviatopolk's nemesis, Prince Yaroslav of Kiev. While the servants were gutting the animals, they came under fire from Kievan archers on the opposite bank.

The servants grabbed their arms, waded through the shallow waters, and routed the enemy archers. When word reached Boleslaw that there was fighting underway, he ordered his army to assemble for battle. Mounted Polish knights and sergeants splashed through the river and thundered towards the enemy camp in the distance.

Before Yaroslav's troops could form up for battle, Boleslaw's men were upon them. The Rus fled for their lives. It was truly a decisive victory as Yaroslav fled Kiev for the safety of Novgorod 600 miles to the north. Boleslaw triumphantly entered the heavily fortified city unopposed. During the course of his occupation, he amassed plunder and on the return march secured new territory as compensation for his troubles.

Fox-like cunning

Twenty-five year-old Duke Boleslaw I Chrobry inherited the Principality of Greater Poland from his father Mieszko upon his death in 992. Mieszko had converted to Roman Catholicism in 966. After his conversion, he established a bishopric at Gniezno to promote Christianity throughout his lands and submitted to the authority of the Holy See. He unified Poland through a combination of coercion and conquest.

Like Mieszko, Boleslaw ruled Poland as a vassal of the Holy Roman Emperor. However, Poland was an affiliate member, not a full member of the empire. Disliking this arrangement, Boleslaw vowed to reduce his obligations; namely, taxes and military service.

Boleslaw's mother was Bohemian Princess Doubravka, but his father Mieszko had sired three more sons with his second wife, the German noblewoman Oda of Haldensleben. In his will, Mieszko had divided his realm among all his sons

In the first two years of his reign, Duke Boleslaw seized the territories left to his half-brothers. He crushed his opponents within Poland and seized control of their lands with "fox-like cunning" according to German chronicler Thietmar of Merseburg.

Strategic alliances

Boleslaw was favourably inclined towards youthful Holy Roman Emperor Otto III because Otto seemed likely to agree to freeing the Poles of some of their imperial obligations.

The 19-year-old emperor arranged for Rome to elevate Gniezno to Metropolitan See with its own archbishop. This boosted Poland in the eyes of Latin Christendom and liberated the Polish Catholic Church from the German-controlled Archbishop of Magdeburg.

Otto journeyed to Gniezno in early 1000 to visit the burial site of Saint Adalbert, the former Bishop of Prague who had been martyred three years earlier trying to convert pagan Prussians to Christianity.

Otto sought Boleslaw's support for his dream of expanding the Holy Roman Empire. To enlist Boleslaw's support for this initiative, Otto recognised Boleslaw as Poland's sovereign ruler – legitimising his reign.

In a ceremony before he departed from Gniezno, Otto placed a crown on Boleslaw's head. But the Holy See rejected Boleslaw's subsequent request for an anointed coronation by the Archbishop of Gniezno.

During this period, Boleslaw established a monarchical system of government to rule over Poland. He also sought to establish strategic alliances through marriage. He eventually succeeded in forging such ties with Bohemia, Hungary and Kiev.

Western offensive

Emperor Otto died prematurely from illness in January 1002. Following his death, Germany became embroiled in a bloody succession crisis since the emperor had died childless. Three contenders for the throne of Germany were Duke Herman of Swabia, Duke Henry of Bavaria and Margrave Eckard of Meissen. Duke Henry's supporters assassinated Margrave Eckard of Meissen, a relative of

BOLESLAW I OF POLAND

Boleslaw I of Poland wears a conical helmet and a long-sleeved mail hauberk underneath his crimson cloak. His weapons are a sword carried in a leather-covered wooden scabbard, a long-bladed spear and an iron axe. When mounted his small round shield is secured to his hip or back with a long leather strap.

Boleslaw fought three wars with Germany in which he won control of strategic lands between the middle Elbe and Oder rivers that buffered the Polish heartland. Regarded as one of Poland's greatest rulers, he welded its rival duchies into a kingdom, created a uniform system of taxation and fielded an army that rivalled those of neighbouring realms.

"IN THE FIRST TWO YEARS OF HIS REIGN, DUKE BOLESLAW SEIZED THE TERRITORIES LEFT TO HIS HALF-BROTHERS. HE CRUSHED HIS OPPONENTS WITHIN POLAND AND SEIZED CONTROL OF THEIR LANDS"

Crown illustration source: Wiki / Wereszczynski

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Boleslaw's, who many considered the leading candidate for the throne. Henry succeeded in seizing and holding onto the throne despite the support of the German nobility.

Boleslaw saw the succession crisis as an opportune moment to pluck valuable lands on the German frontier for Poland. He mobilised Polish forces and overran the Saxon East Mark. Turning south, he seized the strategic towns of Bautzen, Strehla and Meissen. These conquests he garrisoned with Polish troops. He even went so far as to have border posts driven into the bottom of the Elbe and Saale rivers to mark Poland's new southwestern frontier.

Boleslaw attended a diet of the Saxon nobility in Merseburg on 25 July 1002. Henry, who had been elected king the previous month, was present at the meeting. He offered to allow Boleslaw to retain both Upper and Lower Lusatia as German fiefs, but he demanded the return of Meissen.

As Boleslaw began his journey homeward, he narrowly escaped being assassinated by Henry's agents. Enraged by Henry's treachery, Boleslaw torched the town of Strehla in Meissen and refused to surrender the region. Henry was preoccupied with other crises and unable to take immediate action against Boleslaw.

First war with Germany

The first of three wars between Germany and Poland erupted in 1003. Boleslaw wanted to protect the southern flank of his forces in Meissen, so he invaded the Duchy of Bohemia and installed a pro-Polish tyrant in the first year of the war. When the tyrant embarked on a reign of terror, the Bohemians beseeched Boleslaw for relief. The Polish duke removed the tyrant, and then he took control of the duchy himself.

Henry launched a major offensive the following year with the aim of taking back all of the territory Boleslaw had annexed. After invading Lusatia, he assembled a large German army and fought his way to Prague. Boleslaw narrowly escaped from Prague before it fell to the Germans. Henry then marched north into Meissen and besieged Bautzen, the capital of the margravate. Although the Polish garrison fought valiantly, it eventually capitulated.

For his invasion of Greater Poland in 1005, Henry allied himself with the pagan Luticians to strengthen his army. Many Germans disapproved of an alliance with heathens to wage war against the Christian Duke of Poland. German soldiers resented marching alongside unbelievers whose standards bore pagan idols. "How can you reconcile persecuting a Christian [Boleslaw] and maintaining a friendship with a pagan people?" German Bishop Bruno of Querfurt asked Henry. "How can a holy lance be carried next to satanic banners drenched in human blood?"

"HOW CAN A HOLY LANCE BE CARRIED NEXT TO SATANIC BANNERS DRENCHED IN HUMAN BLOOD?"

When the Germans reached the Oder, they found Boleslaw's troops guarding the principal crossing at Crossen. German scouts found an unguarded ford and outflanked the Poles.

The weight of the German advance forced Boleslaw to fall back on the defences of Poznan in the face of the larger German army. Henry's advance stalled. In the weeks that followed, Polish light troops repeatedly struck Henry's supply line.

In the peace treaty concluded that year, Henry took possession of Upper and Lower Lusatia and Meissen, while Boleslaw was allowed to keep only Moravia.

March to Magdeburg

Henry sent substantial funds to the Bohemians to enable them to defend themselves against Poland. In April 1007, Henry demanded additional territorial concessions from Boleslaw. When the Polish duke refused, Henry nullified the existing peace agreement. The second Polish-German war would drag on for six years.

For a major invasion of Germany in 1007, Boleslaw ordered his nobles to assemble their druzhinas, or personal guard, and he also called up a general levy of freemen. The Polish army invaded the German Northern March and fought its way to the outskirts of Magdeburg. After laying waste to the lands on the right bank of the Elbe, he withdrew. Henry, who was dealing with a rebellion in Lotharingia, was unable to counter Boleslaw's swift offensive.

In a move that would have major implications for Poland during the second half of his reign, Boleslaw wed one of his daughters that year to Kievan Prince Sviatopolk. After his successful invasion of the Northern March, Boleslaw recovered Upper and Lower Lusatia.

Henry assembled an army composed of Germans, Saxons and Bohemians in 1010 for a major offensive against the Poles. These forces invaded Silesia, but the attack stalled because of poor leadership and low morale.

Low-level warfare dragged on for the next three years until Henry and Boleslaw negotiated a treaty in 1013. As a result of the treaty, Boleslaw took possession of Upper and Lower Lusatia and swore an oath to hold them as German fiefs.

Relations improved for a short while. Henry even pledged to send a contingent of German

Boleslaw I and his father, Mieszko I, created the Polish state and gave it a functioning royal government

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Boleslaw the Brave marches triumphantly into Kiev to restore his son-in-law Sviatopolk I to power

Clockwise from top right: *German King Henry II allied himself with the pagans to strengthen his army in his wars against Duke Boleslaw of Poland*

Boleslaw I of Poland put frontier poles in the Elbe and Saale rivers to mark his conquests in the Saxon marches

Boleslaw had the body of Bishop Adalbert of Prague, who was executed by Prussians, interred at the Gniezno Cathedral

knights to support Boleslaw in his planned offensive against Kievan Rus. While Boleslaw went to war in the east, Pope Benedict VIII crowned Henry emperor in a ceremony in Rome on 14 February 1014.

Third war with Germany

Henry tried one last time to pry Boleslaw from Lusatia. After accusing Boleslaw in early 1015 of failing to perform his duties as a vassal, Henry crossed the Oder River at Krosno, but began withdrawing when a Saxon army failed to reinforce him. Boleslaw's troops harried the Germans as they withdrew through Lusatia. The third war between the Germans and Poles changed nothing. Indeed, Boleslaw already was making preparations to invade Kievan Rus.

The inveterate foes concluded a final peace on 30 January 1018, in Bautzen. Boleslaw's aggression paid handsome dividends. Henry allowed him to retain Upper and Lower Lusatia. Although they were technically held as German fiefs, that language was merely a face-saving measure for Henry.

Military offensives during the three wars consisted for the most part of sustained raids into enemy or disputed territory. Few pitched battles were fought. On the whole, Boleslaw kept his armies intact and made Henry pay a substantial cost in troops and property trying to hold onto the German marches on the middle Elbe.

Kievan succession crisis

Boleslaw had forged an alliance with Grand Prince Vladimir of Kiev in 1007, but five years later the Kievans imprisoned his daughter and son-in-law Sviatopolk for alleged treason. Boleslaw led a Polish army to Kiev that succeeded in securing his release in 1013.

Upon Vladimir's death in 1015, Sviatopolk ordered the execution of three of Vladimir's sons. A fourth son, Prince Yaroslav of Novgorod, led the resistance to Sviatopolk, who the Kievans dubbed 'The Accursed'. Yaroslav's Novgorodians defeated Sviatopolk's Kievan army in 1016 at Liubech on the Dnieper River. Sviatopolk fled to Poland and Yaroslav took the throne of Kiev.

Two years later, Boleslaw once again marched into Kiev. At the frontier he routed Yaroslav's army and put his son-in-law back in power. Boleslaw plundered Kiev, gaining "incalculable wealth" to use the words of Thietmar of Merseburg, and returned to Poland.

Boleslaw also took advantage of the Kievan instability to annex the so-called Cherven Cities, a group of fortified towns in western Galicia. This gave Poland a substantial buffer against Kievan aggression on its southeastern frontier. Although Yaroslav drove Sviatopolk from power in 1019, Boleslaw had profited from his son-in-law's schemes.

Always the opportunist, Boleslaw took advantage of the instability of the empire following Henry II's death in 1024 to be crowned the first monarch of Poland. After receiving the approval of newly elected Pope John XIX, Boleslaw proceeded with the coronation. He was anointed and crowned by the Archbishop of Gniezno in a coronation ceremony held Easter Sunday 1025 in the Gniezno Cathedral. Two months later he died of natural causes at the age of 57.

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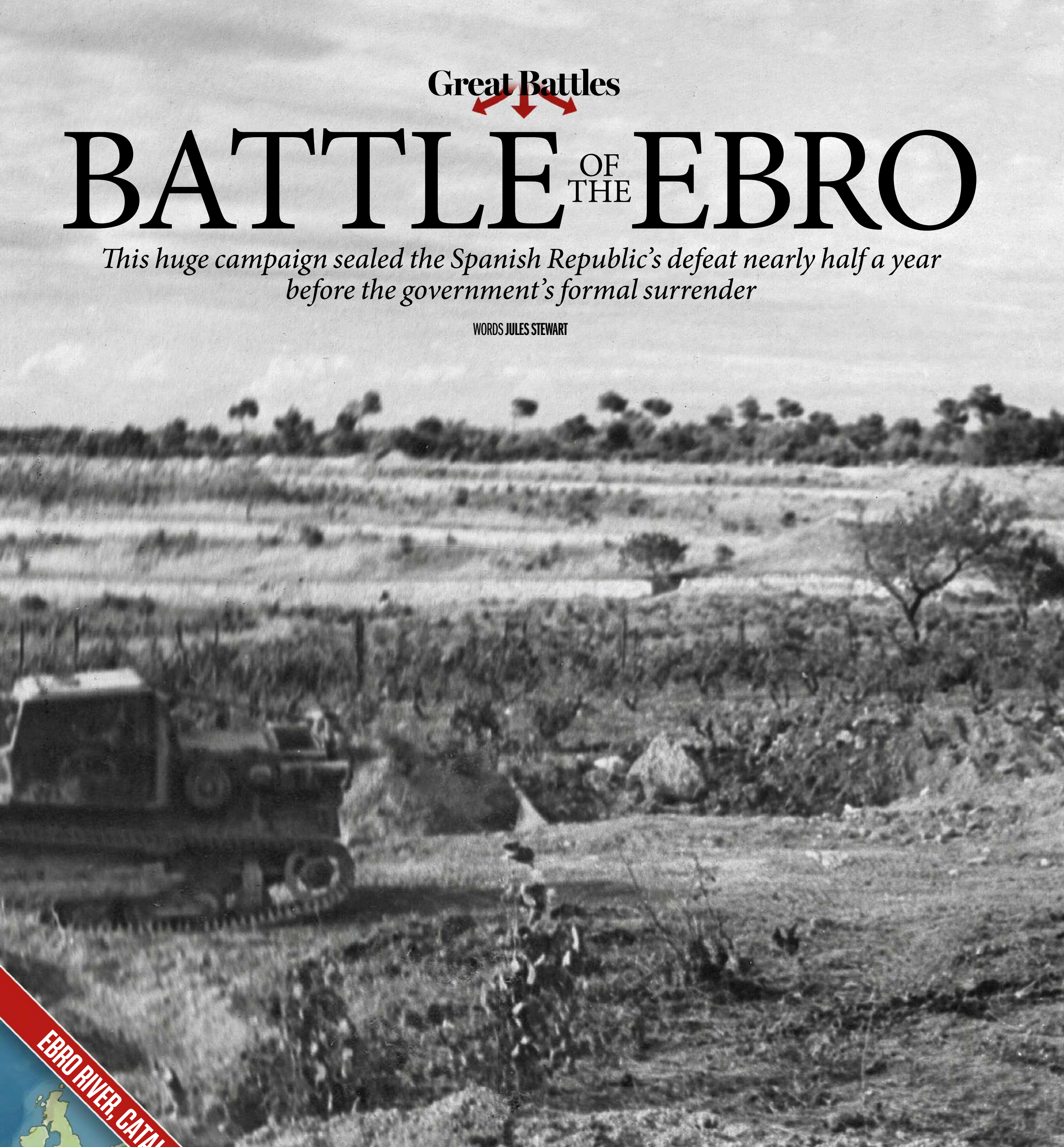
Great Battles

BATTLE OF THE EBRO

This huge campaign sealed the Spanish Republic's defeat nearly half a year before the government's formal surrender

WORDS **JULES STEWART**



EBRO RIVER, CATALONIA JULY – NOVEMBER 1938

On the morning of 1 April 1939, Spaniards switched on their radios to listen to the high-pitched voice of Francisco Franco, the pudgy general from Galicia, who plunged Spain into three years of civil war that left half a million dead and a country in ruins. "On this day, having captured and disarmed the Communist army, the Nationalist troops have attained their last military objective. The war has ended." Not quite. Open combat between rival armies on the battlefield had effectively come to an end. Within weeks of the ceasefire, bands of Spanish ex-combatants, known as the Maquis, unleashed a guerrilla offensive from bases in France and in Spanish safe houses. The campaign lasted until the 1960s, with acts of sabotage and assassinations of Francoist troops and politicians, which in the end achieved little more than nuisance value. Spain was locked firmly in the dictator's grip and would remain so for nearly 40 years.

The Republic's death knell was in fact sounded five months before Franco's pronouncement, on the banks of the Ebro River in Catalonia, the scene of the longest battle of the civil war and the bloodiest in Spain's long history of warfare. "The Battle of the Ebro was the fundamental turning point of the Spanish Civil War," says historian Jason Webster. "It was a last serious throw of the dice by the Republic against Franco's armies and an attempt to get off the back foot and impose a significant defeat on an enemy which, until that point, had had the upper hand for well over a year. Internally, within the Republican side, it was also the culmination of the rise of Communist power, with Communist forces and commanders at the forefront of the offensive."

German armour moves towards the Gaeta heights, in the autumn, 1938

OPPOSING FORCES

NATIONALISTS

LEADERS
General Fidel Dávila
General Francisco Franco
General Joan Yagüe
Lieutenant General Rafael García Valiño
General Fernando Barrón

TROOPS
90,000
FIGHTER AIRCRAFT
100
BOMBERS
140
TANKS
100
GUNS
300

VS

REPUBLIC

LEADERS
General Vicente Rojo Lluch
General Juan Modesto
General Enrique Líster
Lieutenant Colonel Etelvino Vega
Lieutenant Colonel Manuel Tagüeña

TROOPS
80,000
FIELD BATTERIES
70-80
ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS
27
TANKS
22
GUNS
150

© Getty

By the time the attack was launched on 25 July, the Nationalist insurgents were already confident of their ultimate victory. The Battle of Teruel, fought between December 1937 and February 1938, had exhausted the resources of the Republican army. Given their slender supplies of material and with the French frontier closed to retreat, it was rash of the Republican commanders to choose this time to embark on an offensive. The lack of forethought and proper planning meant that the Republican drive across the Ebro was doomed to come to grief.

The rationale for taking this action was to stop Franco's advance on Valencia. The Popular Front government had left Madrid to establish their new headquarters in Valencia in November 1936. When the Nationalist campaign on the city began, in March 1939 Prime Minister Juan Negrín and his Cabinet Valencia made their final stand in Barcelona. The Ebro campaign saved the port city from capture but only temporarily, as it fell into Franco's hands a few weeks after the government's departure.

On the eve of the Ebro offensive, Republican troops resembled a corps of professional soldiers, for almost the first time since war had broken out in July 1936. They followed orders and the structure of a chain of command, rather than acting as the largely irregular and ill-disciplined militiamen of early days. Many of these men, a large number of them only teenagers, were to be involved in the amphibious crossing of the River Ebro. On an international level, there were hopes that political winds might be blowing in the Republic's favour, with tension increasing over Nazi Germany's demands to annex the Sudetenland. A new world war was in the offing, one which Republican leader Negrín desperately hoped would bring Britain and France to his aid.

On the morning of 24 July, as final preparations for the attack were underway, Negrín warned the Republican war council in Barcelona of the need for the assault, arguing that Valencia would be lost unless there were a diversionary action elsewhere. The basic strategy was to hit the Nationalists' salient to the sea by forcing a passage across the Ebro at several points about 60 miles from the Mediterranean coast. The Ebro gamble, which the Republic set into motion on the back of these assumptions, did not pay off.

"TROOPS ON THE EAST BANK SPENT WEEKS ASSEMBLING BOATS AND PONTOON BRIDGES AND, IN MANY CASES, LEARNING TO SWIM"

"The aim was to confuse the communications between the Nationalists in the Levante and Catalonia and, if possible, strike across to restore land communications between Catalonia and the rest of Republican Spain," according to British Hispanist Hugh Thomas. "To carry out this bold scheme, a new Army of the Ebro had been constituted under General Juan Modesto, consisting of the V Army Corps under Enrique Líster and the XV under Lieutenant Colonel Manuel Tagüeña. The XVIII Army Corps was in reserve." This force of about 100,000 men was supported by 70 to 80 field batteries and 27 anti-aircraft guns. All the leading commanders were Community Party militants.

Franco's decision to attack Valencia instead of advancing on the far bigger prize of Barcelona was hotly contested by members of his general staff. There were even hushed murmurs among high-ranking officers about removing him from command. There was some justification for this malcontent. Relieving the pressure on Barcelona enabled the Republican army to reorganise at the end of spring and beginning of summer 1938. With the mobilising of new drafts, the Republic's Chief of General Staff Vicente Rojo drew up a plan to unite the severed link between Levante and Catalonia by means of the all-out offensive along the Ebro River. Rojo's objective in planning this operation was to deal the enemy a definitive blow in order to lift the threat on Valencia. In doing so, the avuncular, bespectacled general argued he would seize the initiative from the Nationalist forces and reverse the course of the war.

On the night of 24-25 July, shortly after midnight, with no moon, several units of the Republican army under the command of the charismatic Communist General Enrique Líster began crossing the river in boats. The Battle of the Ebro, the longest and harshest of the whole war, was underway. The crossing points had been proposed by Michael Dunbar, the chief of staff of the XV International Brigade and graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge. As an aside, as late as 1942 complaints were raised in the British Parliament that despite having led

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International Brigade soldiers with a Russian PM M1910 machine-gun, during the Spanish Civil War

A Spanish propaganda poster from the Spanish Civil War, the text reads: 'Defending Madrid is Defending Catalonia'

DEFENSAR MADRID ES DEFENSAR CATALUNYA!

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more than 100,000 men at the Ebro, Dunbar ranked as a mere sergeant in the British Army.

The crossing of the Ebro was from the outset a remarkable military operation. The 600-mile Ebro is the longest river running entirely in Spain. It is a mighty waterway, resembling along much of the army's crossing points a perilous monster poised to devour anyone who ventures into its waters. Republican troops on the east bank spent weeks assembling boats and pontoon bridges and, in many cases, learning to swim. It was easy work for Francoist spies to pass on this information to the Nationalist troops dug in on the left bank of the river, waiting in full readiness for the impending assault.

The cracks in the Republic's battle strategy began to show before the operation got underway. The date originally set for the amphibian assault was the night of 22-23 July. A shortage of artillery pieces and reserve ammunition made it necessary to delay the attack by 24 hours. Francoist spies were therefore able to relay this intelligence to the Nationalist commanders, thus depriving the Republican forces of the benefit of tactical surprise. Negrín had been informed of the army's need to stock up on equipment and supplies. In spite of the precarious situation, he was not prepared to grant a further delay.

The assault began at a quarter past midnight, following the plan devised by Dunbar. Units under Tagüeña made the crossing at points positioned between the towns of Mequinenza and Fayón. Líster and the V Army launched a simultaneous attack at several points between an arc formed by Fagón and Cherta, as well as the more important target of Amposta, 30 miles south near the sea. One hundred small boats, each carrying eight men, five pontoon bridges and another five of various construction had been assembled. Officers made the passage at the head of their men. Material would follow over the bridges, once they were safely swung across the river. Dunbar, who was witness to the events, reported that a tank became jammed on one of these bridges and delayed the shipment of

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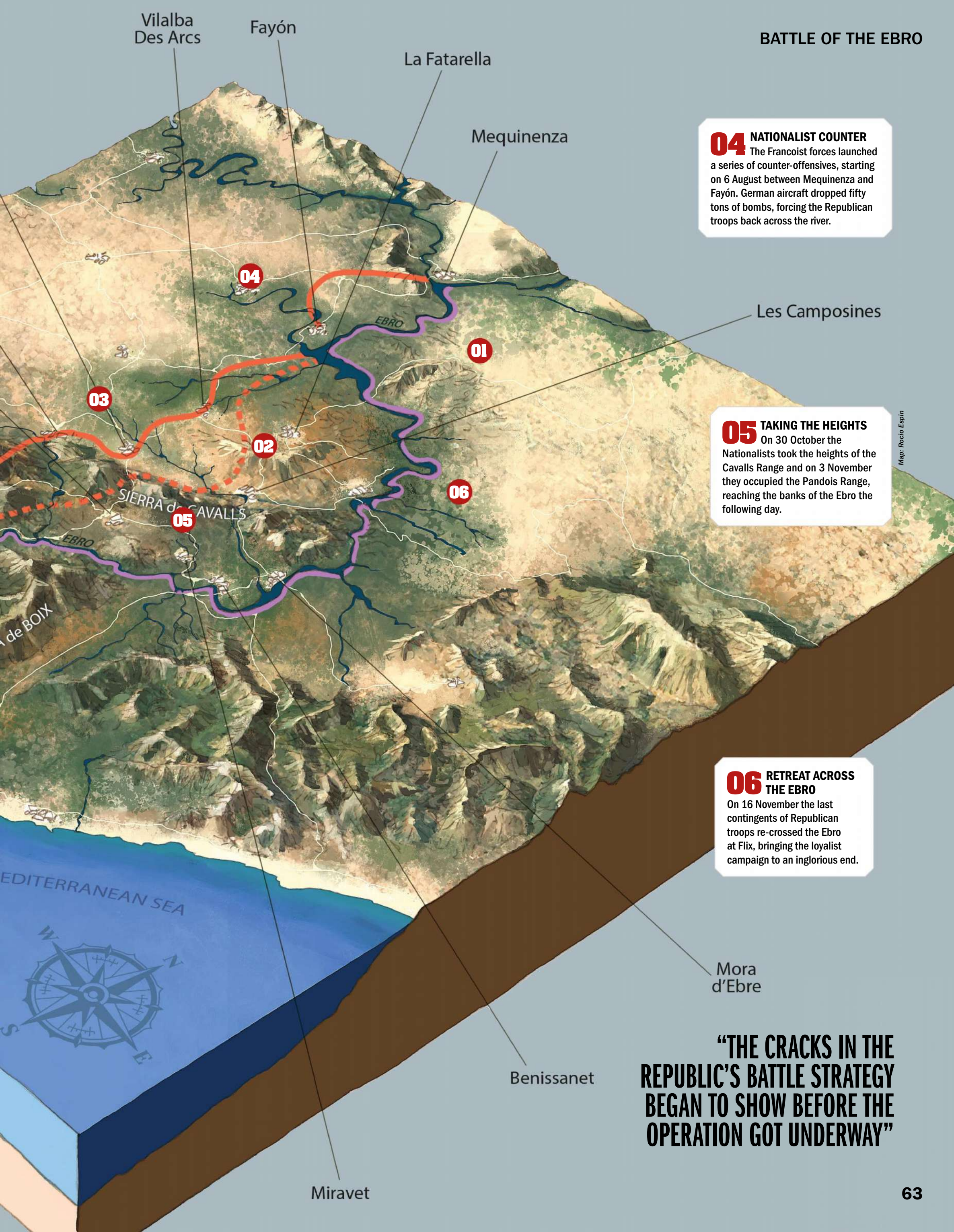
General Francisco Franco at the Battle of the Ebro

BATTLE OF THE EBRO



04 NATIONALIST COUNTER
The Francoist forces launched a series of counter-offensives, starting on 6 August between Mequinenza and Fayón. German aircraft dropped fifty tons of bombs, forcing the Republican troops back across the river.

05 TAKING THE HEIGHTS
On 30 October the Nationalists took the heights of the Cavalls Range and on 3 November they occupied the Pandois Range, reaching the banks of the Ebro the following day.

06 RETREAT ACROSS THE EBRO
On 16 November the last contingents of Republican troops re-crossed the Ebro at Flix, bringing the loyalist campaign to an inglorious end.

Map: Rocio Espin

"THE CRACKS IN THE REPUBLIC'S BATTLE STRATEGY BEGAN TO SHOW BEFORE THE OPERATION GOT UNDERWAY"

Republican soldiers cross the Ebro River during the Battle of the Ebro

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materiel. It was a dark omen – had it not been for this mishap, the Republican attack could have at least reached Alcañiz, well inland in the province of Teruel.

The north flank at Mequinenza-Fayón and Amposta to the south were considered secondary objectives. They were put under attack as a diversionary tactic, to distract the enemy's attention from the main offensive taking place between Riba-roja and Benifallet to halt the Nationalist drive on Valencia. Units of the Republican 3rd Division swiftly surrounded Riba-roja and by dawn the Francoist forces holding out in the village had surrendered. At the same time, other detachments of the 3rd captured a large petrochemical plant and marched on to the village of Flix on the banks of the Ebro. All was going well, or so it seemed. But then the Republican advance in the southern sector was stopped at Amposta, with a high loss in men and armaments. What was left of the units were forced to retreat across the river. The centre fared somewhat better at first. The Francoist forces were caught by surprise, not anticipating a major attack in this sector. Ascó and Flix were occupied and a dozen other villages in the insurgents' hands fell to the Republican army. Nobody imagined on that heady morning that Flix was taken with relative ease, that four months later this was to be the retreating point for the last remnants of the Republican forces, bringing to an end the Battle of the Ebro.

A portent of what lay in store for the Republican army was the near destruction of the 42nd Division, which was in the first wave across with 9,500 troops. A fortnight later they returned to their base on the river's right bank with less than half their men: 12,000 losses, 1,000 killed for each day of fighting on a single front. As early as the end of July, foreign correspondents covering the Spanish Civil War were sending home dispatches that spoke of faltering hopes of a Republican victory. A story published by the *New York Times* three days after the crossing, under the headline 'Ebro Drive Meets Stiffer Resistance' said, "The Spanish Republican's offensive across the Ebro River is still making headway, although its progress has slowed down in the last 48 hours. The Republicans reached positions yesterday a few miles north of Gandesa, about 12 miles south of the Ebro. The latest news was that the insurgents were now holding firm."

In the first three days after the Republican attack, Franco ordered men and guns rushed from Zaragoza Province through Caspe and Alcañiz toward Gandesa, which was threatened from the north and east by Republican forces. Gandesa was a strategic position on the main Tarragona-Alcañiz road and its loss to the Republicans would have had a negative impact on Nationalist morale. The Republicans' nearest base for supplying their forces was the town of Falset in Tarragona Province, more than 20 miles away across the Ebro. This made it difficult to consolidate new positions and push attacks toward Gandesa, Caspe and Alcañiz.

"A FORTNIGHT LATER THEY RETURNED TO THEIR BASE ON THE RIVER'S RIGHT BANK WITH LESS THAN HALF THEIR MEN: 12,000 LOSSES, 1,000 KILLED FOR EACH DAY OF FIGHTING ON A SINGLE FRONT"

While fierce fighting raged on the ground, Franco's German Luftwaffe allies launched continuous air attacks almost from the day the first Republican contingents set foot in insurgent-held territory. The strategy was to destroy the bridges to cut off any possibility of the Republic sending armoured reinforcements across the river. Republican engineers worked through the night to repair the damage.

There were days in which the Germans dropped a thousand or more tons of explosives on enemy positions. The Nationalist high command ordered the floodgates of several reservoirs opened to render the river impassable for small craft.

The Battle of the Ebro was for the Republican military commanders an uncomfortable replay of the battles at Belchite, Brunete and Teruel, in which a rapid loyalist advance was quickly halted, with the Nationalists moving with equal speed to recover lost ground. "The military rebels' advance through Catalonia seemed to be inevitable, it being the nearest and best

Ruins of the town of Belchite, near to Zaragoza in the Aragon region

objective given the state of the Republican troops after the collapse of the Aragón front," explains Spanish military historian Julián Casanova. The Ebro offensive temporarily held up the Nationalist onslaught, as had been the case in previous battles. This time, Casanova says "it was almost throughout a defensive battle whose aim was to tire the adversary and force them to negotiate a victory that was less unconditional, rather than to defeat them, which was impossible. In the end, the Republic had lost the best of its army and soon afterwards the whole of Catalonia".

The decisive battle took place at Gandesa, the Nationalists' communications centre. Líster had rapidly advanced about 20 miles, taking his brigade within striking distance of the town. All the enemy's main observation points on high ground were captured, along with 4,000 Nationalist prisoners. Franco had meanwhile ordered seven divisional commanders to the front, while Líster kept up a desperate round-the-clock assault in the stifling August heat.

When the Republican advance was contained by the newly-arrived insurgent troops, the loyalists began digging in trenches. They suffered devastating high-altitude bombing and low strafing from rebel aircraft and their German allies, with hardly any resistance from the diminished anti-aircraft defences and fighters of their opponents.

On average, 10,000 tons landed every day on Republican positions. When the campaign of deadly attrition had ended, Gandesa was relieved and Franco had gained 150 square miles of newly-won territory.

The definitive turning of the tide came on 30 October, when the Nationalists launched their long-awaited counter offensive along the Ebro. The exhausted Republican positions were subjected to incessant bombardment by nearly 200 Nationalist and Italian Fascist batteries and more than 200 aircraft. The Republican air force could muster no more than 50 fighters, which made no impression on this aerial armada. On 3 November, Lieutenant General Alfredo Galera, advancing through the village of Pinell, arrived at the Ebro. All the right flank of the Nationalist army had reached its objective. The Battle of the Ebro was as good as lost. The last Republican defence points were abandoned, while the final stages of the conflict were delayed by the snows of winter. On 18 November the last Republican contingents escaped across the river.

Estimates of casualties vary, but the figure of nearly 100,000 dead and wounded is generally accepted as close to accurate. The Battle of the Ebro cost the loyalist forces about 200 aircraft as well as a great store of military equipment of all kinds, including 1,800 machine-guns and 24,000 rifles. It is beyond dispute that the Republic had lost its army in the north of Spain and with it, the war.

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Francisco Franco eating at his headquarters during the Battle of the Ebro, 1938

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THE CHACO WAR

DEATH IN GREEN HELL

From 1932 until 1935 two small South American countries fought over a remote territory hoping to seize vast oil riches, but neither side achieved a clean victory

WORDS: **MIGUEL MIRANDA**

With the global economy reeling from the Great Depression that swept the 1930s, it seemed unthinkable for armed conflict to occur anywhere. But this is exactly what happened in different corners of the world, whether inflamed by imperial fascism or national pride. In the heart of South America, sovereignty over an uninhabitable wilderness drew two landlocked rivals to lengths neither foresaw.

Since gaining its independence in 1825, Bolivia suffered an extended run of misfortune that dashed whatever promise it once held. Named after the Venezuelan revolutionary hero General Simon Bolivar, whose wars of independence between 1810 and 1826 freed several Latin American countries from the Spanish Empire, the country had its start with an immense geographic advantage that was whittled away by aggressive neighbours. In 1884, for example, Chile seized Bolivia's limited coastline and reduced it to a landlocked state whose politics were dominated by petty strongmen who strangled democracy.

Paraguay was no different. From 1865 to 1870 it fought a ruinous war against its much larger neighbours Argentina, Brazil and Chile only to be annihilated, its population reduced by at least a third. At the onset of the 20th century, Paraguay remained impoverished and underdeveloped. Yet for several decades it exercised nominal control over the Gran Chaco, a frontier region that Bolivia also coveted as a transit point for its significant fossil fuel and mineral resources.

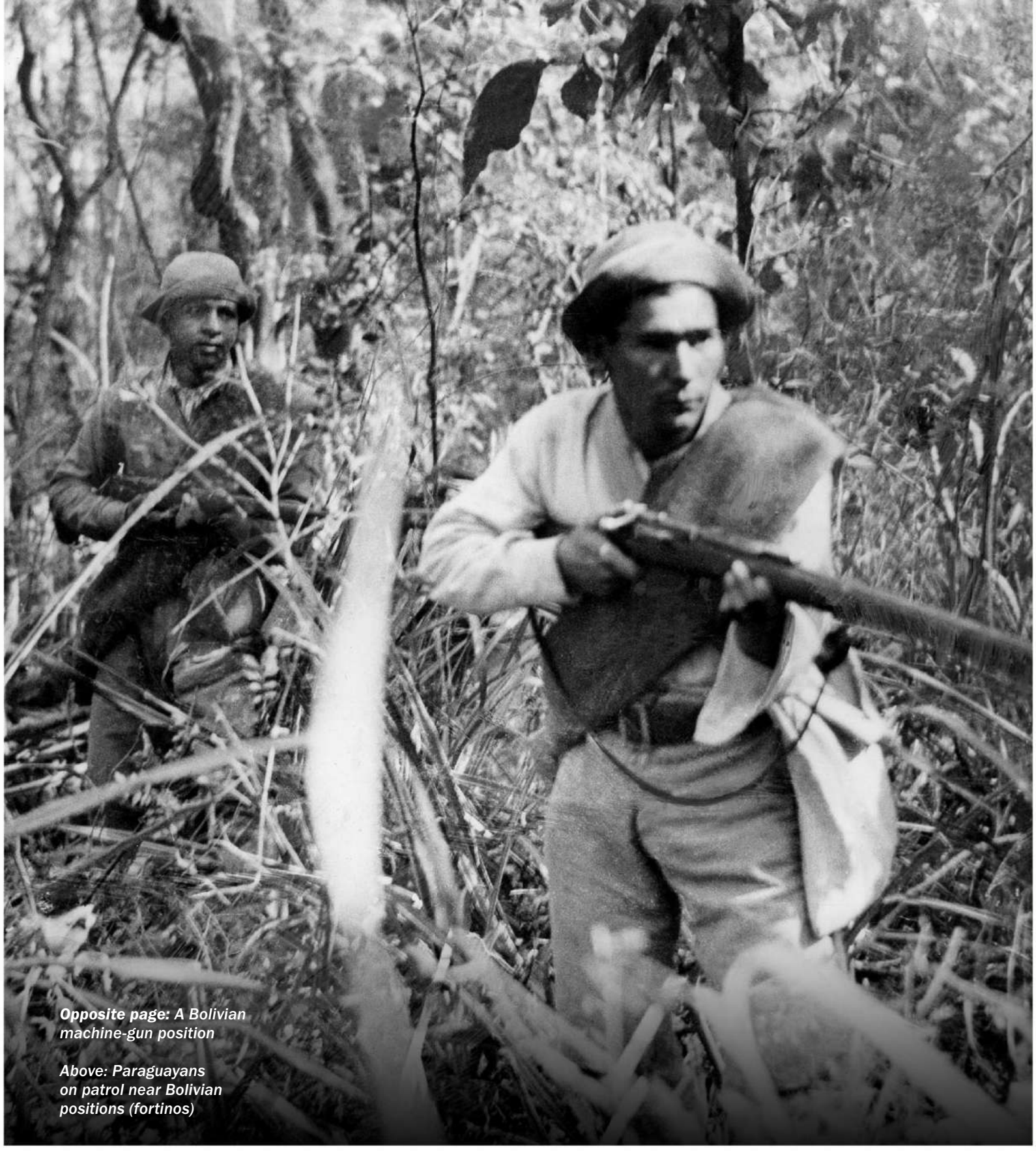
Sparsely populated and bullied by its neighbours – even Brazil had stolen the fertile northeast in 1903 – Bolivia's leaders in La Paz, the capital, knew the country's progress would be difficult. This spurred the ridiculous pattern of caudillos, or local strongmen, who governed from La Paz over successive generations. For decades these strongmen have tried to fix the troubles facing Bolivia, and other countries, and they have always failed in the attempt.

> "THE MILLIONS OF DOLLARS SPENT PURCHASING ARMS FROM BRITAIN AND GERMANY HAD NO EFFECT ON PREPARING THE GRAN CHACO FOR BROAD MILITARY OPERATIONS"

The rise of President Daniel Domingo Salamanca in 1931 promised a break from the disappointing past. The country was in good standing with its trade partners and was courted by the powerful multinational firms looking for the next boom in natural resources. For several decades Bolivia's tin mines were so lucrative they became synonymous with the country the way beef is associated with Argentina and silver with Peru. Yet in the southern borders, where mere covenants sponsored by stronger neighbours kept the peace, the situation remained tense.

The Gran Chaco, whose size is comparable to a small European country such as Lithuania, existed in a state of geographic uncertainty. To enforce its claim, Bolivia's leaders made sure token garrisons were lodged in fortins or outposts to deter any encroachment by Paraguay's own soldiers. The tenuous peace held until December 1930 when horsemen overran the fortins in Vanguardia and compelled its few sentries to surrender.

The resulting public outcry in La Paz and Bolivia's other far-flung cities could not be ignored by President Salamanca and his generals. Making good use of its revenues



Opposite page: A Bolivian machine-gun position

Above: Paraguayans on patrol near Bolivian positions (fortinos)

from mineral exports, Bolivia had slowly built up its armaments for all-out war should the Gran Chaco become a contentious matter.

Fighting blind

After months of tense anticipation it was Bolivia who initiated hostilities in September 1932. The grand offensive involving Vickers tankettes and biplanes proved an exercise in futility. Since 1907, the Bolivian army enjoyed a surplus on manpower with annual conscription of all combat age men in a country whose population reached 10 million by 1930. This mattered little when it should have. It turned out the millions of dollars spent purchasing arms from Britain and Germany had no effect on preparing the Gran Chaco for broad military operations.

At the start of the war Bolivia's planners had at least two corps-sized formations in the Chaco. The reality was these were undermanned collections of troops whose numbers barely reached 8,000-strong. By October the Paraguayan commander, the ruthless Colonel Jose Felix Estigarribia, had effected a counter-attack and checked the Bolivian advance. Owing to Paraguay's feeble economy, its leader President Eusebio Ayala avoided declaring war and allowed his commanders free rein in conducting defensive actions (war was officially declared by Paraguay on 10 May 1933). Yet in La Paz, President Salamanca, knowing full well that time was of the essence, allowed the controversial German military adviser Hans Kundt to take charge of the Bolivian army.

A mere Prussian lieutenant when he arrived in Bolivia 20 years previous, Kundt's background and management skills revitalised Bolivia's martial class and allowed it to modernise with the budget it had. Although he left Bolivia in a cloud of scandal – Kundt was suspected of helping plot a coup d'etat – the patriotic fervour induced by the Chaco War left the Bolivians clamouring for a heroic figure. Nonetheless, Kundt, for all his polish and experience, had severe military failings. Once in command of the army he tried waging a great war with neither the resources nor the tools for effecting a total defeat on Paraguay's forces. His nemesis, Colonel Estigarribia had the better of him throughout 1933 since he understood the Chaco's environment better and turned limitations into advantages. The Paraguayan army did not have enough rifles; Colonel Estigarribia made sure his men could fight with machetes as long as they attacked in close quarters.

WHO HAD THE UPPER HAND?

At the onset of fighting in late 1932 it seemed as if Bolivia, with its numerical advantage and air fleet, had the advantage. The odds were certainly stacked against Paraguay as it struggled to collect enough men and material for holding the Gran Chaco. By 1934, the Bolivian army peaked at 100,000 conscripts, many of whom hailed from indigenous communities, and Paraguay managed to raise almost the same number. Yet the imbalance meant little when the effort of transporting so many forces to the theatre strained what little infrastructure both countries had.

A particular advantage for Paraguay, in fact, was the river that bore its name, the Rio Paraguay, and a single length of railroad. Rather than depend on motor transport, barges and gunboats sailed up and down the river bearing the necessary cargo like ammunition and food. Later in the war Paraguay's government, led by the steadfast President Ayala who had access to Argentine loans, scraped together enough money to pay for trucks. This spared the country's hard-pressed soldiers from the deprivation and sickness that afflicted the Bolivians. Under the direction of Felix Estigarribia new trails and even roads were hacked through the wilderness to deepen the army's logistical reach. Meanwhile, Bolivia maximised its aerial transports to little avail. There simply were not enough planes to haul fuel and food in a region where functional airstrips were scarce. As the war dragged on, Bolivians who were captured in battle found themselves in better conditions when imprisoned – at least they were fed and were not deprived of water.

With peace concluded by 1935 the death toll suffered by either side was enormous relative to their populations. Of the nearly 250,000 Bolivians pressed into service, one in four perished in the Chaco, and half the army were stricken by illness rather than injuries. Paraguay managed to gather more than 125,000 men for the war with almost the same casualty rate.

All images © Getty

Bolivia did have an air fleet with biplanes and light transports that gave it control of the skies. This was pointless in the Chaco since the vegetation was too thick and there were few critical targets worth bombing. Mechanised formations were a near total waste. The few light tanks Bolivia mustered in the Chaco either failed or were destroyed with artillery. In late 1932, before Kundt took command of the Bolivian army, the area known as Boqueron was seized and held. It was a rare triumph. The ensuing two years were bitter ones.

The debacles in Nanawa, southeast of the Gran Chaco, and later Via Mapa exposed the disorganisation and haphazard structure that plagued the Bolivian army. In early 1934 a demoralised Kundt resigned from his post and boarded a plane to depart the Chaco. He was replaced by General Enrique Peñaranda, whose own record in the Chaco War barely improved on his predecessor.

Hunger and thirst

Regardless of who commanded the Bolivian divisions, at the front the suffering endured by the army's conscripts was indescribable. By 1934 the continued resistance by Paraguay, helped along by Colonel Estigarribia's decisiveness, inflicted significant casualties on the Bolivians. The demand for manpower was turning into a national crisis. At this point in the war it was common for government recruiters to travel the length of the country and collect young men and suspected deserters. This was needed as re-enlisting older conscripts had a negative impact on public life; taking professionals and fully employed workers meant harm to the already strained economy. Now imagine a young man in his late teens who had spent much of his life as a field hand in a communal farm. Just two years prior he looked on with envy as his older brothers and cousins, and perhaps an uncle or two, flocked to join the army. Two years later and the war is almost never discussed until, of course, the recruiters arrive and visit each house in the young man's barrio as if conducting a census. The young man's parents are resigned to the fact their son cannot escape the summons of the recruiters.

Once he and his peers are collected by a lorry the following day a new and uncertain life unfolds. After less than a month of rigorous training the young man, now a fresh conscript, is ordered to join his division in the Chaco. His uniform is unkempt and the army cannot even spare him a helmet; while he has enough cartridges for his Mauser rifle, the quality of his meals are poor and his shoes hurt. His first trip aboard a plane is quite an adventure but once he arrives in a dusty plain he is shocked by the squalor surrounding him. After a few days spent unloading supplies from the visiting aircraft he is issued a machete and sent on his way along with several hundred other conscripts. The food on the march gets worse, of course, since meat is scarce and the tastiest meal to be had is canned beef seized months ago from enemy stocks. To deaden their hunger pangs, the recruits nibble on coca leaves and sip on tea if they can get a small fire started. With little to no combat for weeks on end, each day is a monastic routine of rising early, mundane chores and consuming a water ration. The water stinks, by the way, and dysentery is common.

"THE INEPTITUDE AND POOR JUDGMENT OF GENERAL PEÑARANDA AND HIS STAFF COULD NOT BE HIDDEN"

The sole reminder of the war is the frequent thunderclap from the British-made field guns and overflights by lone biplanes searching for the Paraguayan lines. There are marches too, over great distances amid pristine forest, and still no sight of the enemy.

After several months the young conscript has adjusted to a soldier's life. The uniform he wore upon arrival is in tatters and his boots have disappeared. The Mauser rifle is in fine working condition though and the fortin his battalion holds is packed with ammunition imported from Britain, Czechoslovakia and Germany. If only the same applied to the food, a meagre ration of hard bread cooked over an open flame and the ubiquitous coca leaves. The Paraguayan offensive in late 1934 upsets this difficult but tranquil existence. The actual fighting lasts mere days and the garrison is overrun by screaming horsemen armed with revolvers.

The conscript, along with hundreds of his exhausted comrades, surrenders when the ammunition runs out; supplies were not replenished in the course of the fighting since these could not be brought by truck. After a gruelling march to captivity, the nameless conscript is imprisoned in a schoolhouse where

***Left to right:** A light machine-gun of the Bolivian army used as an AA-gun*

Outnumbered 2:1 the Paraguayans managed to seize and hold territory even with their forces stretched thin

An overlooked aspect of the Chaco War is how it portended the coming World War. Like the ensuing conflicts in Spain and China, German-made armaments were ubiquitous in the theatre

he is given new clothes. At least the food is passable, cooked beans and coffee, and the Red Cross are willing to deliver items sent by the conscript's family back home. The nurses are also kind enough to write down letters dictated by illiterate Bolivians. Nobody is sure when the war is supposed to end.

An exhausted peace

The Paraguayan offensive in mid-1934 by the promoted Major General Estigarribia was hugely successful. In mere weeks Bolivia lost all the territory it held since the beginning of the war. The ineptitude and poor judgment of General Peñaranda and his staff could not be hidden. The past three years saw enormous sums diverted by La Paz to armaments and supplies but the Bolivian army still lacked the needed logistical backbone for supporting large-scale decisive battles. With the nation bankrupt and the armed forces in disarray, President Salamanca found himself in a worse situation than at the beginning of the war. He decided to take matters into his own hands and direct the counter-offensive himself, a difficult task considering his lack of military experience.

Of course, the army was against this, and as soon as President Salamanca arrived in the Chaco to relieve his top generals a devious plot was underway. On the morning of 27 November 1934, General Peñaranda's troops surrounded the president's temporary residence and deposed their leader. Here was another coup d'etat executed in dramatic and improvised fashion, an activity that was almost a time-honoured tradition for Bolivia's political class. But having Salamanca out of the picture accomplished little. The army no longer had the resources to continue the war. At this point between 15,000 to 20,000 Bolivians were taken prisoner and perhaps three times this figure were killed. Paraguay paid a high price too. Its government was bankrupted by exorbitant loans granted by the Argentinians and, for a country with less than a million people, having a tenth of its manpower under arms left the economy in tatters. A temporary peace was agreed upon in Buenos Aires in June the following year, since it was the Argentines who put the most effort in arranging regional diplomacy, and the war ended on a sour note. Paraguay may have gained the Gran Chaco but it was at a high cost; its liberal-leaning government was toppled by a popular rising in 1936, an event fuelled by economic stagnation and public anger over the war's conduct that killed more than 40,000 men. Bolivia, on the other hand, suffered its latest defeat and seemed humbled in the decades that followed. No more violent disputes with its neighbours occurred for the rest of the 20th century.

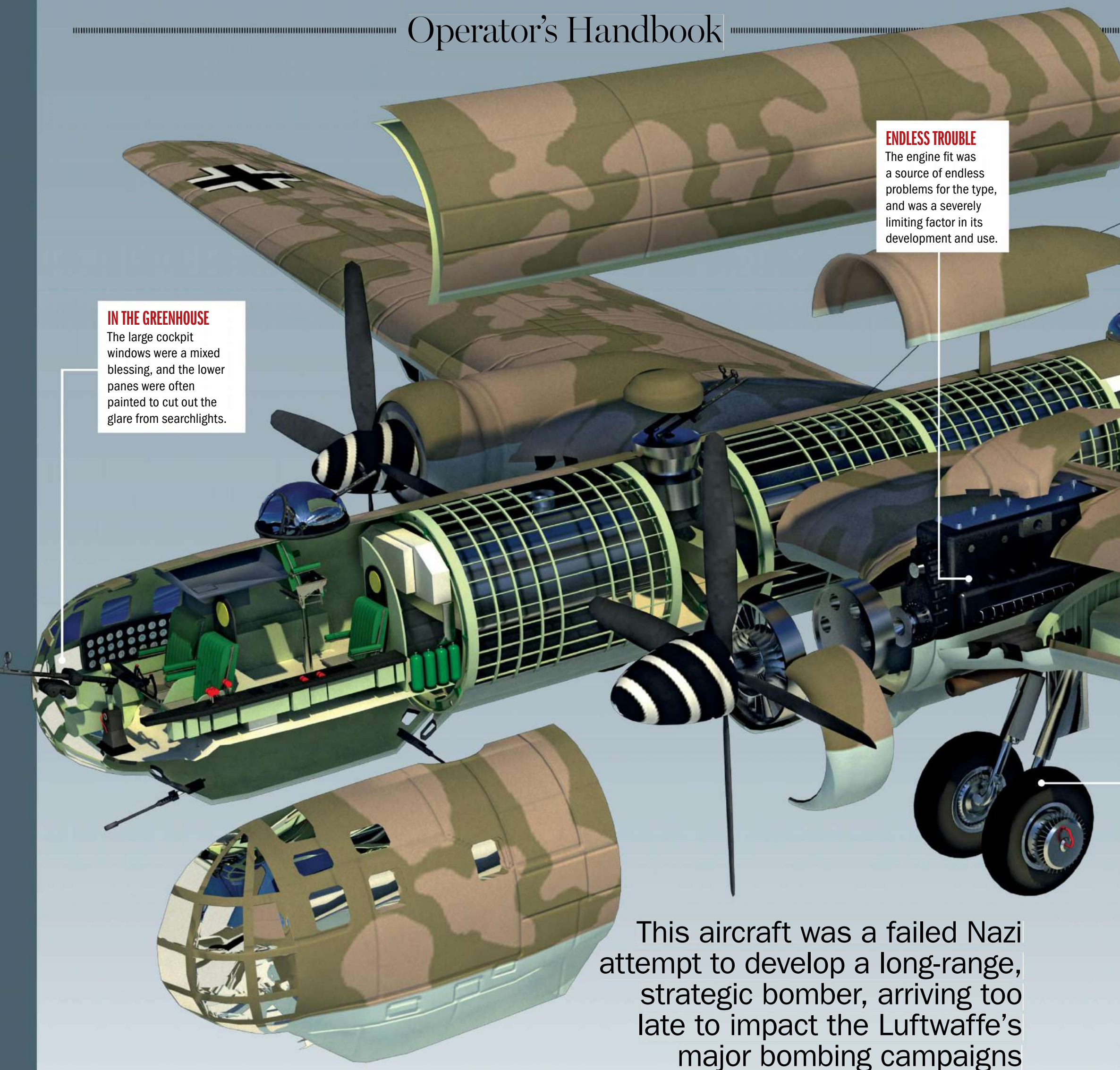
It took 74 years until the former belligerents settled their dispute for good. Once again, it was the Argentine capital Buenos Aires that hosted the occasion in 2009, this time a symbolic gesture between Bolivia's Evo Morales and Paraguay's Fernando Lugo, to recognise the final demarcation of their respective borders. The lesson from that moment is clear. The Chaco War is remembered as a brutal and unnecessary confrontation. Given time and a commitment to diplomacy, countries can win the peace if they try harder at mutual understanding.

THE EMPTY GRAN CHACO

As soon as the war ended, with Paraguay almost doubling its territory, a new consensus emerged to explain how two poverty-stricken nations engaged in such a futile struggle. It became fashionable to blame the unseen hand of foreign companies such as Standard Oil and Royal Dutch Shell as the true instigators of the Chaco conflict. Historians have since debunked these claims for lack of evidence since Paraguay never fully exploited the Gran Chaco for its resources. Neither was there a sudden exodus to claim the Chaco from its wilderness. Besides reclusive indigenous communities the Chaco's only other inhabitants are self-sufficient Mennonites. Much of the Chaco remains untouched and sparsely populated today even when an enormous shale deposit borrowed its name.

Covering an expanse the size of France, and spread over four countries, the so-called 'Chaco Basin' is formed by underground shale deposits – oil particles trapped in sedimentary rock formations hundreds of metres deep – whose recoverable fossil fuel promises enormous returns. The terrible irony is the extent of this basin skirts the Gran Chaco's actual territory and stretches deep inside Bolivia. With the exception of its native plants and wildlife there are few economic opportunities within the Chaco. Disregarding arguments in favour of conserving the Chaco's biodiversity, industrial agriculture is the single economic pursuit that maximises its potential. But the government of Paraguay and its neighbours are opposed to this harmful exploitation.

All images © Getty



IN THE GREENHOUSE
The large cockpit windows were a mixed blessing, and the lower panes were often painted to cut out the glare from searchlights.

ENDLESS TROUBLE
The engine fit was a source of endless problems for the type, and was a severely limiting factor in its development and use.

This aircraft was a failed Nazi attempt to develop a long-range, strategic bomber, arriving too late to impact the Luftwaffe's major bombing campaigns

HEINKEL He. 177

WORDS **STUART HADAWAY**

18+

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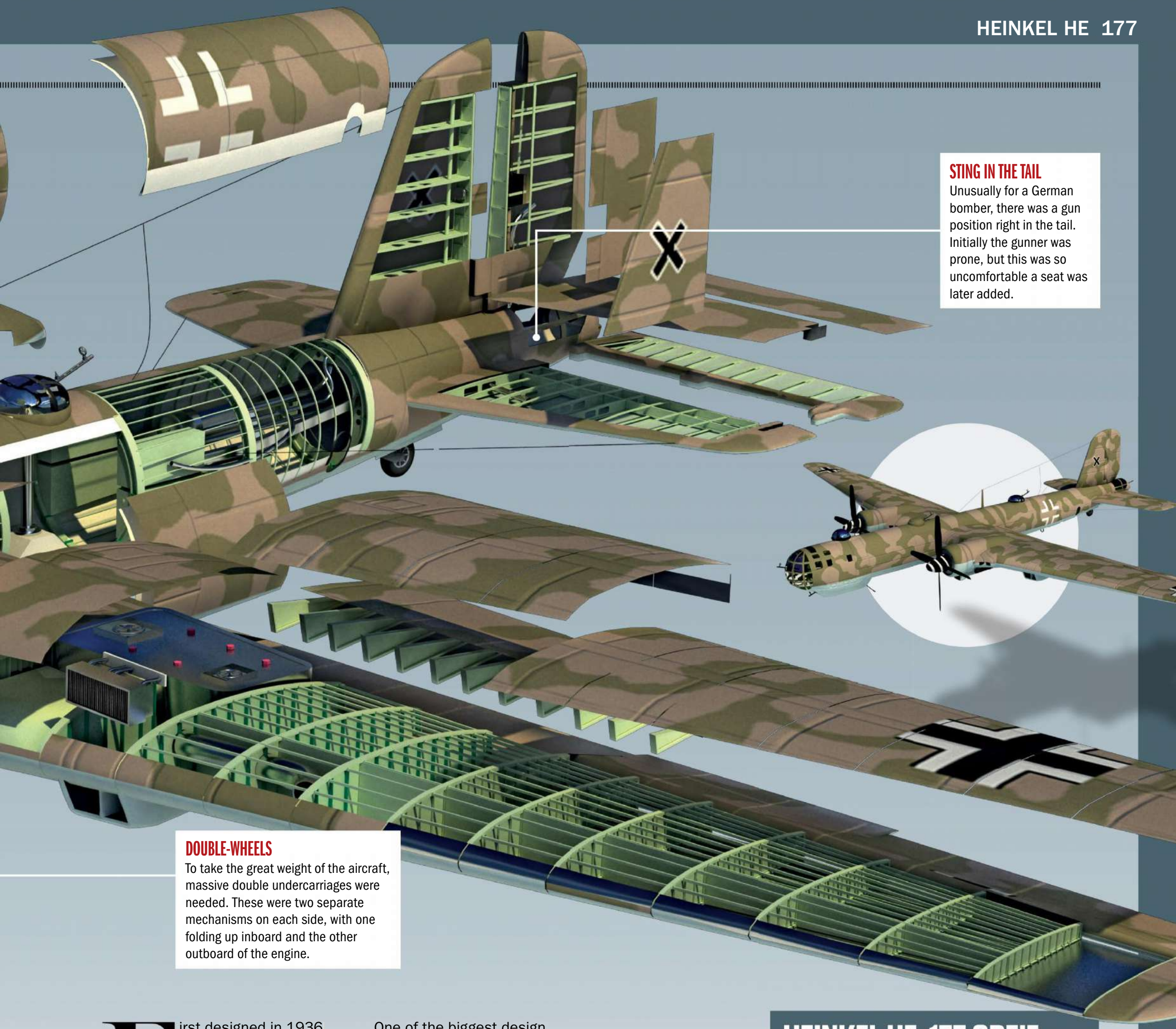


STING IN THE TAIL
Unusually for a German bomber, there was a gun position right in the tail. Initially the gunner was prone, but this was so uncomfortable a seat was later added.

DOUBLE-WHEELS
To take the great weight of the aircraft, massive double undercarriages were needed. These were two separate mechanisms on each side, with one folding up inboard and the other outboard of the engine.

First designed in 1936 and then modified to a 1938 specification for a long-range, strategic heavy bomber, the Heinkel He. 177 Greif ('Griffin') was another example of exemplary German engineering that would never meet its full potential.

The Griffin's development was hampered by unreasonable requirements, such as the need for the aircraft to act as a dive bomber. This strict demand, finally lifted in 1942, was totally impractical for an aircraft of this size, and was a result of Hitler's continued obsession with aircraft only having a tactical or battlefield use, as well as his lack of real interest in strategic bomber development.

One of the biggest design issues for the Griffin was its engines. In order to reduce drag the aircraft was designed with only two nacelles, one on each wing, however no German engine could produce adequate power to lift such a large aircraft. Therefore, two engines were coupled together in each nacelle, which was a source of constant technical difficulties and frequent fires.

Even after entering service in 1942, the aircraft was constantly misused, and few ever took on a truly strategic bomber role. Even if they had been, though, by this time in the war, German fuel shortages meant that they could only ever be used in small numbers, with limited results.

HEINKEL HE. 177 GREIF

COMMISSIONED:	1938
ORIGIN:	GERMANY
LENGTH:	19.4M (63FT 6.5IN)
RANGE:	5,500KM (3,417 MILES)
ENGINE:	2 X DAIMLER BENZ DB610 2,133KW (2,860HP) 24 CYLINDER LIQUID COOLED
CREW:	6
WINGSPAN:	31.44M (103FT 2IN)
PRIMARY WEAPON:	UP TO 7,000KG (15,000LB) OF BOMBS, OR 3 EITHER FRITZ X OR HENSCHEL HS. 293 GUIDED BOMBS

Illustrations: Alex Pang

A Heinkel He. 111 makes an early test drop of a Henschel Hs 293 anti-shipping guided missile

Source: Wiki / Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-676-7972A-34 / Blaschka / CC-BY-SA 3.0

"THESE SHORT-RANGE GLIDE BOMBS WERE REMOTELY GUIDED BY THE BOMB AIMER USING A JOYSTICK IN THE NOSE OF THE BOMBER"

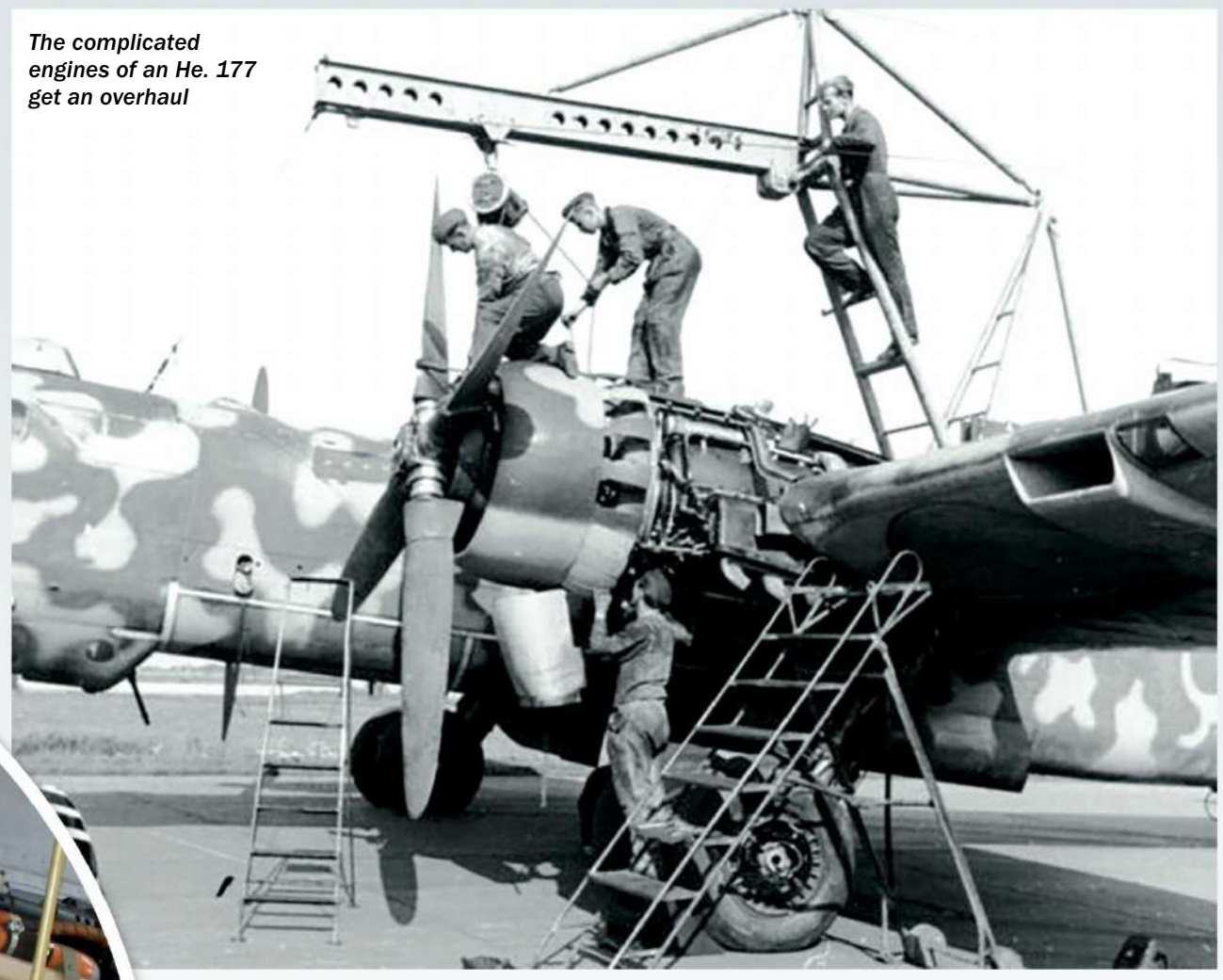
© Alamy

ARMAMENT

The Heinkel could carry a conventional payload of bombs, but could also carry up to three anti-ship guided bombs – either Henschel Hs. 293s or 'Fritz X' types. These short-range glide bombs were remotely guided by the bomb aimer using a joystick in the nose of the bomber – a tricky and not very effective technique, although several Allied warships and merchantmen were lost to the weapons. The Greif's defensive armament included five machine-guns and two cannon, some of them in remote-controlled turrets.

Source: Wiki / Rottweiler

The complicated engines of an He. 177 get an overhaul



Source: Wiki / Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-676-7972A-14 / Blaschka / CC-BY-SA 3.0

The DB605, as used singly in the Messerschmitt Bf. 109G

ENGINE

Germany never produced a single engine of suitable power for the He. 177. Instead, two engines were fitted front-to-back on each wing, with a single gear casing linking the two crank shaft pinions to a single airscrew shaft. Initially, two Daimler Benz DB601s were coupled to make the DB605, rated at 1,912kW (2,564hp). In 1942 these were replaced by DB605s coupled to make DB610s, rated at 2,200kW (2,950hp). However, both types were plagued with mechanical problems and especially overheating, leading to a considerable number of fires.

© Getty

A bombed-out factory with Heinkel He 177s (foreground), Heinkel He. 111s and Focke Wolfe Fw 190s (rear). Allied bombing constantly hampered He 177 development and manufacture

DESIGN

The Greif was a mid-wing monoplane of all-metal construction, with a stressed duraluminium skin. The type went through extensive modifications, with 36 different types being built, many of them prototypes. The size of the aircraft caused many structural problems, as did the lack of powerful engines. Unrealistic requirements, such as the need to act as a dive bomber, meant that increased strengthening was needed, making the aircraft heavier. This flawed approach to the design of the aircraft led to constant under-performance.

Source: Wiki / Bundesarchiv, Bild 1011-676-7972A-19 / Blaschka / CC-BY-SA 3.0

Source: Wiki / Bundesarchiv, Bild 1011-668-7162-06A / Linden / CC-BY-SA 3.0

The massive weight of the aircraft led to equally massive, and complex, undercarriages

The Greif's bulbous cockpit, with crew hatch and gun positions underneath

Source: Wiki / Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-676-7971A-12 / Blaschka / CC-BY-SA 3.0

A pilot in the cockpit of an Heinkel He. 77

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COCKPIT

The distinctive 'fish bowl' cockpit gave the pilot, navigator, and bomb aimer good fields of view, but left them very exposed. The pilot sat on the left (which left a blind spot directly to his right), with the navigator just behind him. The bomb aimer sat next to the pilot, but moved forward to a position on the lower right hand side to use the bomb sight, or 'fly' the guided bombs.

Source: Wiki/Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-461-0220-07/Heise

Source: Wiki/Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-676-7969A-25/Schroeder

SERVICE HISTORY

The He. 177 entered service in the summer of 1942, but never reached wide-spread service.

Constant mechanical problems and technical changes meant that while only 1,169 were made, these were spread across 36 marques. The type was constantly misused, with unsuccessful attempts to use them as transport aircraft during the Siege of Stalingrad over the winter of 1942-3, and later as tactical bombers working in close support to the army.

From November 1943 the type saw limited successes in flying anti-shipping sorties with glide-bombs, while small numbers were used as night bombers against Britain from January 1944, but their numbers were too small to make a difference. By then, the Germans simply could not afford to operate such large aircraft. In August 1944, an operation by just 80 Greifs would have consumed Germany's entire oil production for that day. By the end of 1944 the type had effectively been withdrawn from service.

Image sources: Wiki / U.S. War Department / Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-676-7969A-23 / Schröder / Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-668-7161-31A / Linden

Top right: *The He. 177 saw limited successes in flying anti-shipping sorties with glide-bombs*

Middle: *He. 177 is loaded on a runway*

Bottom: *The second He. 177 A-0 production prototype (A-02) with broad-bladed propellers, bearing radio code 'DL+AQ'*

Many He 177s were lost to bombing or ground attack as the Allies closed in

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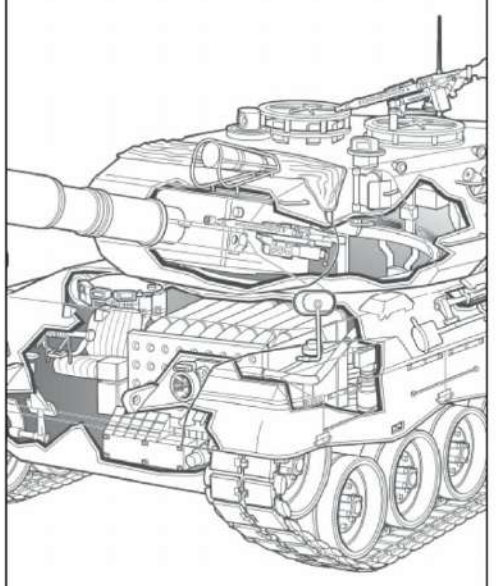

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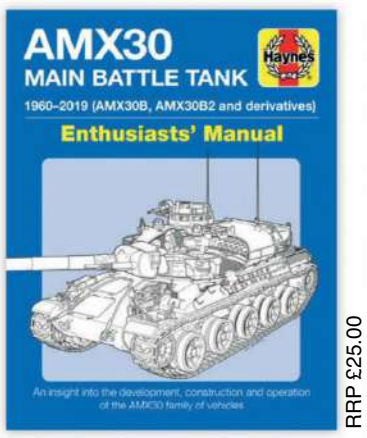

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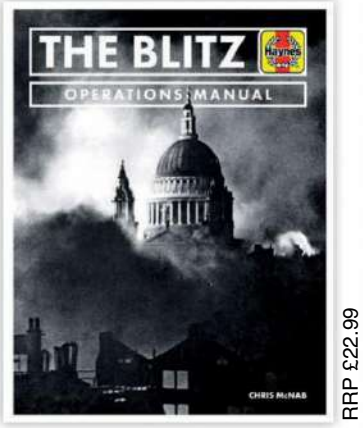

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BATTLE REPORT: PART II

NORMANDY

17 JUNE – 7 JULY 1944

WORDS **CRAIG MOORE**

This battlefield report provides a unique insight into 2 Panzer Division's assessment of the frontline, during the critical weeks following D-Day

In the Summer of 1944, the Allies captured and translated a German battlefield report written by Generalleutnant Freiherr (Baron) von Lüttwitz commander of 2 Panzer Division. This report was dated 14 July 1944 and covered the fighting between 17 June and 7 July. Lüttwitz's unit was being relieved by the 362 Infantry Division, and he was required to appraise its commanding officer of what the situation was like on the front line. Copies of the translated report were then circulated to Allied units in a document called 'Weekly Intelligence Summary No.42'. The document makes fascinating reading, as it is a primary source document written during the battle for Normandy from the German point of view.

The division was not ordered to attack the Allied troops in Normandy following D-Day as German High Command believed that the main assault would still be in Calais, due to misinformation and deception tactics used by the Allies. When they were eventually ordered into Normandy to "push the invading forces back into the sea" they engaged in combat with British troops of the 50th Infantry Division and 7th Armoured Division in the region of Caumont-l'Éventé, 36km southwest of Caen.

The first part of this document, published in **History of War** issue 78, showed how the Allies' total dominance of the skies meant that the Germans had to change tactics. If they moved during daylight hours, they were spotted and bombarded with artillery shells and bombs or rockets from ground-attack aircraft. They had to stay in concealed defensive positions and attack at night.

"OUR OWN ARTILLERY CAN ONLY FIRE ONE-TENTH OF THE AMOUNT FIRED BY THE ENEMY, SUCCESS CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED BY CLOSEST COOPERATION AND BEST POSSIBLE GROUND OBSERVATION"

British Engineers fill the wreck of a German Tiger 1E tank with landmines in order to destroy it, after the allies recaptured the village of Villers-Bocage in Normandy

© Getty

COMMENT

A combat strength report dated 10 June 1944 showed that the 2 Panzer Division, Panzer Regiment 3, had 98 Panzer IV 'long gun' tanks and 79 Panzer V Panther tanks available. The Normandy Bocage limited the usefulness of tanks.

JUNE & JULY 1944 2ND PANZER DIVISION:

PANZER-REGIMENT 3
(3RD TANK REGIMENT)

PANZER-GRENADIER-REGIMENT 2
(2ND MECHANISED INFANTRY REGIMENT)

PANZER-GRENADIER-REGIMENT 304
(304TH MECHANISED INFANTRY REGIMENT)

PANZER-ARTILLERIE-REGIMENT 74
(74TH ARMOURED ARTILLERY REGIMENT)

PANZER-AUFKLÄRUNGS-ABTEILUNG 2
(2ND ARMOURED RECON BATTALION)

HEERES-FLAK-ARTILLERIE-ABTEILUNG 273
(273RD ARMY ANTI-AIRCRAFT BATTALION)

PANZERJÄGER-ABTEILUNG 38
(38TH TANK HUNTER BATTALION)

PANZER-PIONIER-BATAILLON 38
(38TH ARMOURED PIONEER BATTALION)

PANZER-NACHRICHTEN-ABTEILUNG 38
(38TH ARMOURED SIGNALS BATTALION)

PANZER-VERSORGUNGSTRUPPEN 82
(82ND ARMOURED SUPPLY TROOP)

ACCOUNT OF 2 PZ DIV OPERATIONS 17 JUN –7 JUL 1944

★ 362 INF DIV ★ OPS NO.2044/44 MOST SECRET ★ DIV BATTLE HQ, 17 JUL 44 ★ REF: 2 PZ DIV OPS NO.675/44 MOST SECRET, DATED 14 JULY 44 (ONLY TO DIV) ★ 17 COPIES, COPY NO.4

Extract from battle experiences from recent operations by 2 Pz Div whose sector is being taken over by 362 Inf Div

2. TANKS

There is no question of tank employment in the true sense of the term. They can only be employed to accompany infantry. Their mobility is limited by the sunken roads and hedges. They can only penetrate the square areas enclosed by hedges at certain points, and these points are registered by the enemy anti-tank guns. Therefore, the anti-tank weapon must be neutralised before the tanks advance again. Since the country favours close anti-tank combat, each single tank must have a strong flank protection. It is unprofitable to employ more than one troop of tanks at the time. On sunken roads, which are often the only places where tanks can move, the first and last tanks of the column get knocked out, and those in between are wedged in. Therefore, the tanks must work in the closest co-operation with their infantry. The tanks must give high explosive HE and machine-gun covering fire along the ridge of the hedgerow until the infantry have reached it by passing along the hedgerow running at right angles to it. The infantry then mop up, and then the tanks make another bound forward to the next hedgerow, and the process is repeated. In this case, the actual punch is delivered by the infantry and the fire power supplied by the tanks, and thus the control of the operation lies with the infantry.

Panther tank in the Normandy Bocage country 1944

Source: Wiki / Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-722-0406-06A / Theobald

3. ANTI-TANK

(a) *SP. The employment of self-propelled anti-tank guns is extremely limited in country of this kind. Their low structure is a disadvantage, and in many cases, they are unable to shoot over hedges and walls. Since the turret cannot be traversed, self-propelled anti-tank guns are completely helpless on sunken roads. The best method of employing them is to have them in a concealed position at the side of the main roads. Therefore, self-propelled anti-tank guns should be kept back in reserves in order to intercept enemy thrusts along the main roads in the event of an armoured breakthrough.*

COMMENT

The Germans mounted anti-tank guns as well as artillery howitzers on captured or obsolete tank hulls. The guns had a limited traverse. In some situations, the whole vehicle had to move to point the gun at a new threat. In a narrow sunken road, this was impossible.

Source: Craig Moore

Right: *The Normandy Bocage is a patchwork of hedge-lined small fields and sunken lanes*

COMMENT

Allied units would bombard field hedges with high-explosive fragmentation shells. Towed anti-tank gun crews had limited protection from shrapnel.

(b) Tractor drawn

There are not enough of these available. If it were possible to employ these regardless of loss, they would be the best weapon in the main defensive line, since they can be properly camouflaged and dug in and can destroy enemy tanks at the closest range and inflict severe casualties on the enemy infantry in the hedgerows by high explosive HE fire. But they cannot get away again, and their loss has to be reckoned with as a matter of course. Losses and damage inflicted by enemy artillery fire must also be taken into account. The enemy uses his anti-tank guns in this way, but the German can no longer afford to do so. Therefore tractor-drawn anti-tank guns have been withdrawn and placed in depth in the main battle area, where they form the backbone of the main defence zone. The only available anti-tank weapons in the front line proper are the close-combat weapons.

COMMENT

The Allies learnt how to detect the location of enemy artillery batteries in 1917 at the Battle of Cambrai. Their skill increased over the following years, so by 1944 they could quickly send counter-battery fire. German Artillery units soon learnt that to survive they had to quickly 'shoot then scoot'.

4. ARTILLERY

The highest demands are made on the elastic use of artillery. Since our own artillery can only fire one-tenth of the amount fired by the enemy, success can only be achieved by closest cooperation and best possible ground observation; therefore, forward observers must be placed well forward. Ample provision of means of communications are essential. Even in counter-attack, the forward observers must be well forward. It is essential to maintain ample reserves of forward observers in order to avoid loss of all forward observers and their equipment during the enemy barrage. The allotment of 'SOS' tasks which can be brought down automatically during any enemy attack has proved profitable. The artillery must change its positions frequently, since it is spotted very rapidly and engaged with the aid of observation from the air. Good results have been achieved by 'roving' artillery troops and 'roving' guns which mislead the enemy as to the siting and strength of our own guns. Every attempt at harassing fire on the part of our artillery is promptly repaid many times over by the enemy. The artillery must take up different positions by day and night. Here on the Western Front, too, the siting of the artillery for all-round defence is the chief support for the main battle area.

***Right:** An SFH 15cm in fire position, France 1940*

Source: Wiki / Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-054-1527-14 / Bauer / CC-BY-SA 3.0

"IN BAD WEATHER, THE AA CAN BE USED SUCCESSFULLY IN AN ARTILLERY ROLE"

COMMENT

The Germans did not have enough anti-aircraft guns to protect all the troops and vehicles. They had to be selective where they were deployed.

5. ANTI-AIRCRAFT

The anti-aircraft (AA) guns cannot protect everything. It is better to concentrate all the light and heavy AA troops on the point of main effort instead of scattering over the whole Divisional area in troops and sections. In bad weather, the AA can be used successfully in an artillery role. In this case, but in this case, only, they are placed under the command of the artillery. The sighting of light AA troops in concealed positions close behind the main line of defence with the sole task of engaging artillery spotting aircraft. By this means the Division succeeded in shooting down two enemy aircraft in the course of a few days, and now the enemy spotting aircraft keep a safe distance of approximately 3km (1.86 miles) from the main line of defence, whereas formerly they used to fly right over it.

A 3.7cm Flak 43 Zwilling Anti-Aircraft gun in France 1944

Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-301-1957-32 / Kurth / CC-BY-SA 3.0

Germans man an anti-aircraft gun in France

Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-495-3432-21 / Engelmann / CC-BY-SA 3.0

Three German pioneers (sappers) in the ruins east of Aachen

Source: Wiki / Scheek

6. ENGINEERS

The engineers have been particularly successful in an infantry role in this terrain, thanks to their good training in assault and close combat methods. Since they are limited in their employment as infantry, they must, however, be restricted to exceptional cases, since, owing to their numerical inferiority in this close country, their technical engineering tasks in front of and in the main defensive area, and the consolidation of positions in the rear, is of special importance. The commander of the engineers must exercise control over all engineers employed, including all engineer platoons. Owing to the limited means available, this is the only way whereby points of main effort on the part of the engineers can be created. Since the whole operation in this territory demands special skill, the construction of obstacles must be carried out with resource and variety. In this cut-up territory, it is impossible to construct a continuous line of obstacles which can be covered by our own fire from medium and long-range. The improvised anti-personnel mine S.150 issued to the engineers has proved unsatisfactory since the chemical igniter is unreliable. In order not to waste the effort of the engineers in purely labour tasks the Division has combed out all surplus personnel from support columns to provide labour for consolidating the main battle area and rear positions. This method, adopted from the Eastern Front, has proved successful here.

COMMENT

Combat engineers were a limited resource. They were skilled men and the temptation to use them as standard infantry soldiers had to be resisted.

7. Reconnaissance
This is performed exclusively as battle recce. The best results are achieved by bringing back prisoners of war, even if these scarcely disclose anything. Signals interception within the Divisional area scarcely provides any results, since the enemy hardly carries on any wireless telecommunication traffic, and if he does, it is impossible to determine if this is taking place in front of our own sector. Listening has so far produced no results. It is only done for monitoring our own traffic.

8. Signals
The principle remains the same. The Division avoids wireless telecommunication traffic as far as possible. No enemy attempts at direction-finding have yet been confirmed, but this must still be reckoned with. There are signs that the enemy is monitoring our wireless telecommunication traffic.

9. Supplies
The entire supply system, including the receiving, works by night. The time is very short, with the results that losses are constantly incurred due to journeys made in the daytime (also by moonlight). The supply of ammunition is insufficient. Hitherto it has been out of the question to engage the enemy artillery. The enemy, too, is gradually realising this, and is, therefore, moving up closer and closer in order to take full advantage of the range to disrupt our columns in the rear. Consequently, our supply lines are under constant artillery fire, even at night. Our supplies of fuel oils and lubricants are adequate, since the Division is in a fixed position, The use of mechanical transport traffic is reduced to a minimum. The supplies of food obtained for the land are very good, but those obtained through supply channels are mediocre.

The question of spare parts and tyres is a serious problem. The Division has to fetch everything over distances of hundreds of kilometres so that in spite of the Division being engaged in static warfare, its mobility gradually becomes less and less. The enemy's air superiority presents an almost insolvable problem with regard to supplies.

Signed Generalleutnant Diepold George Heinrich Freiherr von Lüttwitz
(Commanding officer of 2 Panzer Division from 27 May 1944 to 31 August 1944)

COMMENT

Allied artillery and self-propelled guns could fire at targets they could not see. The British 25pdr howitzer had a range of 12km (7.45 miles). Reconnaissance aircraft could supply the artillery with grid references of supply dumps and supply columns on the move. Armed with a map and grid reference, these targets could be destroyed behind the German front line.

"OUR SUPPLY LINES ARE UNDER CONSTANT ARTILLERY FIRE, EVEN AT NIGHT"

The Allies were able to replace knocked-out tanks with ease. The Germans did not have similar resources

National Archives USA

Source: Craig Moore

Above: *The Germans used Enigma machines which turned messages into code before transmitting them. The Germans did not realise that the Allies had broken the codes and could decipher, translate and read all the messages they sent*

Below: *The town of Villers-Bocage, photographed during the bombing raid on 30 June 1944*

Source: Wiki / RAF

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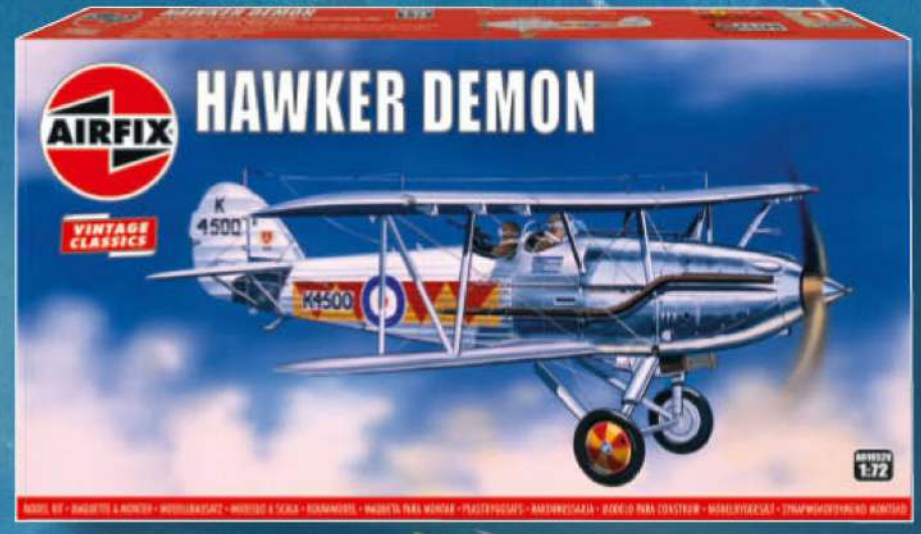
Mould Tools made in 1967, pack illustration by Roy Cross, 1967. One of the great Luftwaffe aircraft. The low speed handling and short field performance of the Fieseler Storch was without equal. Entering Luftwaffe service in 1937, the Storch was never far away from the front lines and didn't need to be flown there. Designed to allow the high mounted wings to fold back, the Storch could either be loaded on a train, or simply towed towards the action. The high wing and unobstructed cockpit meant that the pilot and his observer had an unrivalled view, and the aircraft's low speed made it extremely difficult to shoot down. The Storch had an incredible stall speed of just 31mph and if flying in to a headwind with wing slats and flaps deployed, it almost had the ability to hover.



Code: **A01052V**

Mould Tools made in 1957/68, pack illustration by James Goulding, 1989. Powered by the mighty Rolls Royce Kestrel engine, the new two seat 'Hart Fighter' proved to be a great success and even though it was quickly renamed Demon to differentiate between it and the Hawker Hart light bomber. Just over 300 of these elegant fighters would eventually be produced.

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HOME FRONT

86 RESISTANCE ASSASSINS

Sophie Poldermans on the teenagers who targeted the SS

84

Author Sinclair McKay on the bombing of Dresden

92

The latest films and books on your screens and shelves

98

Artefact of War: An 18th-century grenadier cap

MUSEUMS & EVENTS

Discover Dutch naval tapestries, a rare portrait of a Scottish warrior and the conciliatory wartime links between Coventry and Dresden

Source: Wiki / Deutsche Fotothek

A view from Dresden's city hall over the destroyed centre, 1945

© Alamy

Above: *Coventry's Medieval cathedral and much of the city was destroyed during the blitz of 14 November 1940. The cathedral was rebuilt and reconsecrated in 1962 and is now a leading centre of reconciliation*

COMMEMORATING DRESDEN

Speaking as part of the Stratford Literary Festival, bestselling author Sinclair McKay discusses his new book Dresden: The Fire And The Darkness

Before WWII, Dresden was renowned for its beautiful architecture. However, Allied air raids between 13-15 February 1945 obliterated the city with an estimated 25,000 people being killed. To commemorate the 75th anniversary, Sinclair McKay participated in a special live talk with broadcaster Dan Snow at Coventry Cathedral on 4 February 2020. Speaking at the cathedral, McKay discussed the raid's controversies, Dresden's recovery and the power of reconciliation.

What made the bombing of Dresden particularly infamous?

It came so close to the end of the war and there is that sense that it seemed cruelly unnecessary. It inspires such particular horror because Dresden was, and is, a very beautiful city. There are Baroque cathedrals, fantastic art collections and beautiful streets so there was a sense of aesthetic pity. There was also the horror of 25,000 people being killed in the space of one night.

What individual stories of the bombing stuck out for you?

Dresden City Archive have done a brilliant job of collecting a huge number of eyewitness accounts from people who were either children at the time or letters or memoirs left by older people. They were in inadequate brick cellars because the Nazi authorities didn't consider specialised bomb shelters necessary. The result was that people listened to the bombing above their heads and had poisonous gas seeping through. Horror on this scale included a firestorm that went a mile into the sky and bent the very elements of the air inside out. There were also scorched, baked, mummified and liquefied organs. It's those small details that stand out as particularly haunting.

If 'blame' is to be apportioned, who do you consider to be responsible for Dresden's destruction?

It's incredibly difficult simply because this crossed over a line of rationality. Arthur Harris [commander of RAF Bomber Command] had Dresden on his list of targets but it was only fourth on his list. Churchill had asked for cities in eastern Germany to be bombed so the direct request came from him.

'Blame' is a loaded word because we have to acknowledge that the bombing was an atrocity, there is no way around it. It was an act of pure horror and if there is blame then it ultimately rests with Churchill and also Stalin who requested that this great transport hub of German troops be bombed. There are a lot of people who would have happily have seen Churchill stand trial for it.

Source: Rupert Barnes Photography

Sinclair McKay (right) pictured with broadcaster Dan Snow at Coventry Cathedral, 4 February 2020

What are your views on whether Dresden was a legitimate military operation or a vengeful Allied war crime?

I always hesitate on the words 'war crime' because – as one academic explained – it is a legal term rather than a moral one. You have to take great care because if you say that Dresden was a war crime then the entire Allied bombing campaigns against other cities were as well.

There's an additional difficulty. The scale of the bombing was irrational and the targeting of the city was unreasoned. However, it has to be remembered that it wasn't the last time that Dresden was bombed.

The Americans came back in March and April 1945 and they were still going for railway yards and factories. They clearly thought that Dresden had at least some military value.

How did Dresden recover?

Very slowly. At the end of the war the Soviets immediately marched in and seized power. Dresden became a communist city where the street signs were in Russian as well as German. The cultural switch was fast and so the rebuild was slow. Many of the great architectural treasures continued to lie in ruins for some time.

SOLEBAY'S WOVEN ART

A Dutch museum has acquired two unique tapestries that depict a naval battle of the Third Anglo-Dutch War

The National Maritime Museum in Amsterdam has purchased two rare, royally commissioned tapestries designed by Willem van de Velde the Elder (1611-93) in England. The artworks are part of a series of six that depict various scenes from the Battle of Solebay, which was the first naval battle of the Third Anglo-Dutch War in 1672. Commissioned by Charles II and later James II, the tapestries have been restored with great care in the UK.

The acquisition is the largest in the history of the museum and will go on public display from 2 October 2020 as part of a large Van de Velde exhibition. Sue Prichard, senior curator of arts at Royal Museums Greenwich says, "The tapestries remind us of our shared cultural heritage. The acquisition is not only welcome, but highly appropriate and a symbol of the strong and continuing relationship between our two museums."

Images: National Maritime Museum of Amsterdam

***Left:** The English and Dutch fleets draw up their ships for battle at Solebay, 7 June 1672*

***Above:** The burning of HMS Royal James. English admiral Edward Montagu, 1st Earl of Sandwich was killed in the conflagration*

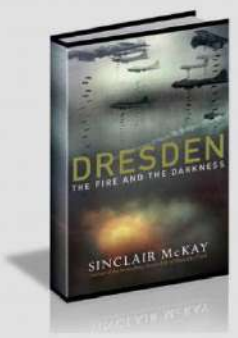
FOR MORE ON THE NATIONAL MARITIME EXHIBITION VISIT WWW.HETSCHEEPVAARTMUSEUM.COM/VANDEVELDE

However, the city has now been completely rebuilt. It is vital, open and cosmopolitan in the way that it was before the darkness of Nazism.

Coventry is famously twinned with Dresden. How important has this act of reconciliation been for both cities?

Contact was made quite early on and parties of children from Coventry went to Dresden to clear away rubble from bombsites. When you consider that Dresden was then behind the Iron Curtain, the relationship is even more striking. Dresden then became twinned with Coventry in 1959. It was fantastically important for the people then and now. For the older generation it really is about putting aside questions of blame etc. They simply want to ensure that it never happens again.

I was at the commemorations in Dresden last year where they had a rendition of the *Dresden Requiem*, which was composed in the year after the bombing. It is a moving piece and there was an old lady sat next to me. She guessed I was English and said with great sincerity, "This is for Coventry too." That generosity of spirit made me think that is exactly what reconciliation is about.



DRESDEN: THE FIRE AND THE DARKNESS IS PUBLISHED BY PENGUIN BOOKS. TO PURCHASE A COPY VISIT: WWW.PENGUIN.CO.UK

THE YOUTHFUL HIGHLANDER

Glasgow Museums has secured a fascinating portrait of a teenage 17th century chieftain who died fighting in Panama

In the background of John Michael Wright's portrait of Lord Mungo Murray is his servant who carries his master's longbow and fur-decorated targe (shield)

Source: CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection

Glasgow Museums has secured a rare portrait of a Highland chieftain that was painted in c.1683. Lord Mungo Murray (1668-1700) was involved in various military expeditions in northern Scotland during the 1680s-90s. He sailed to Panama as part of the doomed Darien Scheme to establish a Scottish colony. He was killed there while fighting the Spanish at the age of 32.

Murray was only 15 when he sat for the portrait but he is presented as having military prowess. He holds a musket, sword, pistols and a dagger. It is the earliest major portrait to depict a sitter full-length in Highland dress. His belted plaid also pre-dates the modern standardisation of clan tartans.

The painting has been put on display in the 'Scottish Identity in Art' Gallery at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow. Art Fund Director Stephen Deuchar says, "Lord Mungo Murray's fine portrait draws on the ideology of the brave and fearless warrior, which is so much part of Scotland's history and identity."

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT: WWW.GLASGOWLIFE.ORG.UK

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Inset below right, left to right: *Truus Oversteegen, Freddie Oversteegen pictured in 1945 and Hannie Schaft who was one of the most famous fighters in the Dutch resistance and became known as 'The Girl with the Red Hair', which latterly she dyed black as a disguise*
Left: *The city of Rotterdam was heavily bombed by the Germans during the invasion of the Netherlands in 1940*

Resistance Assassins

Sophie Poldermans reveals the extraordinary story of three women who used ruthlessly beguiling tactics to kill Nazis and collaborators in the occupied Netherlands

The Dutch resistance deployed many tactics against occupying forces during WWII. These were mostly non-violent in nature and included counterintelligence, domestic sabotage, communicating with the Allies and hiding Jews. A small minority used violence to directly kill Nazis and collaborators but of those only a tiny number were women. However, they were arguably the most audacious fighters.

This included three women from the north Holland city of Haarlem – Hannie Schaft and sisters Truus and Freddie Oversteegen. They are the subject of Sophie Polderman's book *Killing And Seducing Nazis*. Poldermans, a Dutch women's rights advocate, lecturer and writer, knew the Oversteegen sisters in old age and worked with them for the National Hannie Schaft Foundation. She reveals what motivated the women, their methods of killing and the horrendous price of war.

What was the Inspiration behind your book Seducing And Killing Nazis?

I have always been fascinated by wars and how people are capable of committing war crimes. As a teenager, I looked for positive female role models who were true leaders. I found a great example in Hannie Schaft when I wrote a report in high school for my history class. During this research I also discovered the role of the Oversteegen sisters who worked with Hannie Schaft in the armed Dutch resistance as some of the only women.

I found Truus's contact details and called her for an interview. She was so kind to invite me over and trusted me with her story. She also introduced me to Freddie and asked me to be the keynote speaker at the National Hannie Schaft Commemoration in 1998. I knew Truus and Freddie for 20 years and worked closely with them on the board of the National Hannie Schaft Foundation. Truus passed away in 2016 and Freddie in 2018. When Freddie died, there was a huge demand for English information on the topic. I always wanted to write down their story for an English-speaking audience so this was the right time.

What were conditions like for civilians in Haarlem during the occupation?

Conditions were very poor and people needed food stamps in order to get food. The situation gradually hardened and there was a lack of everything including food, clothes etc. This peaked in the winter of 1944-1945, which is known as the Dutch famine.

Jewish citizens were not allowed in certain areas, were forced to wear a yellow star and many were forced into hiding. Unfortunately, many of them were caught by the Nazis and transported to concentration camps. Of the 140,000 Jews in the Netherlands in 1940, it is estimated that around 101,800 were killed or died of starvation or disease.

How prevalent were the activities of women in the Dutch resistance?

In the Netherlands, 90 per cent of the population tried to live their lives as normal as possible. Nevertheless, five per cent consisted of collaborators and another five per cent joined the resistance. There were a few women in the resistance who predominantly distributed illegal newspapers on bicycles or took care of Jewish children. This was either in hiding or bringing them from one safe house to another. There was only a very small minority in the armed resistance and only a handful of those were women. This is what makes the story of Schaft and the Oversteegens so unique.

Image: North Holland Archives

Truus Oversteegen and Hannie Schaft in disguise in Haarlem. Oversteegen (left) is dressed as a man

Truus Oversteegen pictured holding a Sten gun during WWII

Image: North Holland Archives

Why did the Oversteegens and Schaft join the resistance?

Ideals like justice, peace and a liveable world were instilled in these young women and they wanted to fight the enemy. They started by printing and distributing illegal newspapers and stealing identification cards for Jewish people in hiding. They also provided Jewish children with safe houses and gathered intelligence.

Why did they move into more dangerous work?

After a while they wanted to do more and, if necessary, with weapons. They were young but extremely dedicated. They joined the armed group called the 'Council of Resistance' from the summer of 1943. The group's mission was to kill specific Nazi targets and traitors. They did what they did because – in their words – "it had to be done". To them, this was the only way to achieve justice but it was extremely dangerous.

What methods did the girls use to seduce and then kill Nazi officers or collaborators?

The Council of Resistance would establish which particular Nazi target had to be eliminated and who would be assigned to the job. They would usually work in pairs. Hannie, Truus and Freddie worked together on numerous occasions. They would often follow a target riding their bicycles. Sometimes, one of the girls would drive and the other would sit on the back and shoot the target from there. They could use their bicycles to flee quickly.

On other occasions they used their femininity. They would dress up nicely and flirt with their targets to coax information out of them. In some cases they even led them to their deaths.

Is it known how many Nazis and collaborators were killed by the girls?

No. Although I describe quite a few liquidations in my book the Oversteegen sisters never revealed a number. According to Truus, it was irrelevant because it was already bad enough that they had to carry out these missions in the first place. Also, Freddie would fiercely answer that one should not ask a soldier that question – and they were soldiers after all.

What were the circumstances of Hannie Schaft's capture and execution?

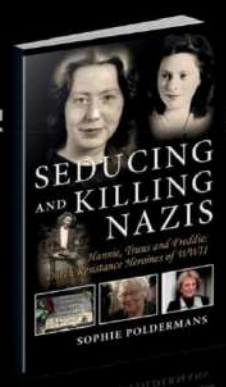
Schaft was arrested on 21 March 1943 during a routine check. Illegal newspapers were discovered on her and she was brought in for questioning. It was only then that the Germans discovered her handgun buried in her purse. They examined her closely and saw the red roots of her dyed-black hair and knew that this was the infamous girl with the red hair that they had been looking for. She was imprisoned and executed on 17 April 1945 less than three weeks before the Netherlands was liberated.

How did the war affect the sisters?

They tried to remain human under inhuman circumstances. They never regretted what they did, but they were traumatised by their experiences, by the killings (they did take human lives after all) and because they were not always able to save Jewish children and people. They suffered from severe nightmares, depression and what we would nowadays call post-traumatic stress disorder.

To what extent has the role of WWII female resistance fighters been recognised?

The role of women in WWII, but also in armed conflict in general, has often been underrepresented or neglected. I have seen that during my research for women in WWII, but also in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. That is why I founded Sophie's Women of War to shed light on these stories in the broadest sense of the word. We live in a world still dominated by men. As far as wars are concerned, women are often portrayed as the main victims while it is often women who resist under such circumstances and show genuine leadership. That is why this story is so important to show strong female role models and leadership. Raising awareness and education concerning this topic is vital.



Seducing And Killing Nazis is published by SWW Press and is available to buy at: **www.seducingandkillingnazis.com**
For more information on *Sophie's Women of War* visit: **www.sophieswomenofwar.com**

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WWII THIS MONTH...

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To commemorate 80 years since the Second World War, every issue **History of War** will be taking a look at some of the key events taking place each month of the conflict

THE KATYN MASSACRE

Between April and May 1940, nearly 22,000 Polish military prisoners of war and civilians were executed by the Soviet Union's People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD). Among the victims were thousands of Polish Army officers, members of the intelligentsia and others imprisoned after the Soviet invasion of the country the previous year. The mass graves of the victims were only discovered years later during the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. One of the first sites of the massacre to be discovered was in the Katyn Forest, in western Russia, though several locations were later linked to the killings.

© Getty

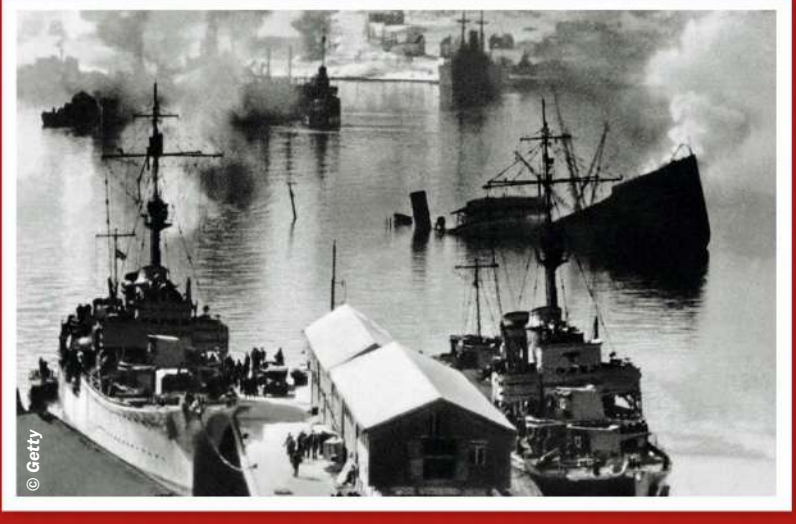
OPERATION WESERÜBUNG

In the early hours of 9 April, Nazi Germany launched its invasion of Denmark and Norway, both officially neutral countries at the time. Since the beginning of hostilities the previous year, both the Allies and Germany had considered the position of the Scandinavian nations, which were rich in vital minerals and ore. Soon after the invasion began, the capital Oslo came under threat of occupation, prompting the Norwegian government and the royal family to escape north. Later, the Norwegian Government in Exile would establish itself in London.

© Getty

CLASHES AROUND NARVIK

After the German invasion of Norway, the Allies quickly tried to establish a foothold in northern Norway, but ahead of ground forces going in the Royal Navy continued to dominate the Norwegian waters. The harbour town of Norvik was fiercely fought over on sea and land during the Norwegian Campaign, as it could serve as a key transportation link for shipping iron ore back to Germany. Despite the Royal Navy triumphing over the Kriegsmarine during several clashes around Narvik in April and May, this would not prove enough to prevent ultimate defeat for the Allies.



© Getty

MINE'S A CUPPA

A Handley Page 'Hampden' bomber crew give the thumbs-up after returning from operations off Bergen, Norway, on 22 April. As well as attacking German ships, Bomber Command crews were also tasked with laying mines in the North Sea to hamper German operations. Earlier in the month Norway had protested against the British Government's decision to mine the country's territorial waters, which had been carried out by the Royal Navy.

© Alamy

REVIEWS

Our pick of the latest military history books and films

MR JONES

BASED ON THE TRUE STORY OF GARETH JONES, THE WELSH JOURNALIST WHO IN 1933 BROKE THE SILENCE ON STALIN'S MAN-MADE FAMINE IN UKRAINE, WHICH KILLED MILLIONS: THE HOLODOMOR

Director: Agnieszka Holland **Starring:** James Norton, Vanessa Kirby, Peter Sarsgaard **Released:** Out now

"Global economic collapse … Meanwhile, the Soviets are having a spending spree. How? Where is the money coming from? How is Stalin paying for it all?" These are the questions which bring young Welsh freelance journalist Gareth Jones to the USSR in 1933.

Having recently made his name as the first foreign correspondent to get access to the newly elected Chancellor of Germany, Adolf Hitler, Jones has no interest in the drug-fuelled decadence and excess offered to the small circle of foreign journalists confined to Moscow.

Following his journalistic instinct, he defies the ban on travel to Soviet Ukraine and takes a train towards Kharkiv, disembarking at a small random station to make his way on foot through the countryside, where the terrifying truth unravels.

Directed by three-time Oscar-nominated Polish filmmaker Agnieszka Holland, Mr Jones, portrayed in the film by James Norton (*Happy Valley*, *McMafia*, *War & Peace*), finds the answer to his question to be more horrifying than any fictional story could ever conjure.

A scene of a crying infant, doomed at the cold dead breast of its mother, is not only heart shattering but perhaps also the most symbolic. Stalin's Five-Year Plan, implemented between 1928- 1932, brought industrial development at the price of mass starvation in 1933. Communism's heavy industry required the enforced collectivisation of agriculture, which, along with political repressions and deportations, created a 'second serfdom' of enslavement. Only this time it was not to wealthy landowners but to the Communist Party which, contrary to all logic, left farmers starving to death after they were unable to meet the unrealistic requisition targets for their own grain, or what was called 'Stalin's Gold'.

Real-life Gareth Jones, who was 27 at the time, spent three days walking through more than 20 villages and collective farms, recording his observations at the very height of the famine in rural Ukraine. Sleeping on dirt floors and sharing the food in his backpack with starving children he met on the way, one little girl exclaimed, "Now that I have eaten such wonderful things, I can die happy."

According to historian Timothy Snyder (*Bloodlands*, 2010) by the spring of 1933, people in villages across Ukraine were dying at the rate of more than 10,000 a day. The exact death toll as a direct result of starvation will never be known. Similar to Snyder, historian Anne Applebaum (*Red Famine*, 2017), puts most recent estimates at around 3.9 million deaths, noting that some estimate the number at an even higher 10 million. All numbers remain beyond our comprehension.

The scale of the horror can never really be fully grasped. Nor did Gareth Jones escape the nightmare unscathed. Perhaps he too paid the ultimate price.

Only in more recent years has the subject of the artificially man-made famine, the Holodomor, become part of long overdue discourse and recognition. This makes Holland's new film all the more important; not just as a film – but as an echo, however faint the cry, of countless starving and dying children that haunted Ukraine's countryside and the madness that only true hunger brings. **MB**

Source: Wiki / Bundesarchiv Bild 183-J31320

Three Volkssturm soldiers with rocket-propelled grenades stand guard at the construction of a roadblock

TO VE-DAY THROUGH GERMAN EYES

THE STORY OF HOW THE GERMANS CONTINUED TO FIGHT LONG AFTER THE OUTCOME OF THE WAR WAS BEYOND DOUBT

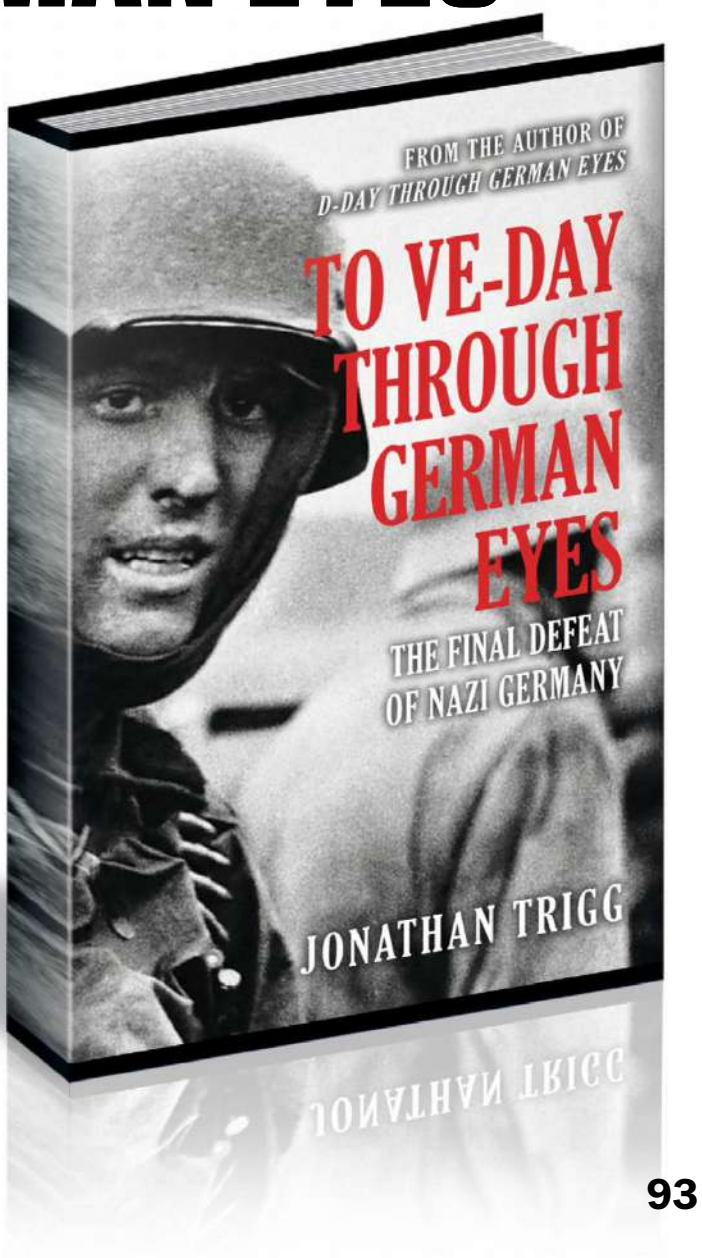
Writer: Jonathan Trigg **Publisher:** Amberley Publishing **Price:** £20

‘It will all be over by Christmas’ is a painfully familiar phrase in military history, and in the vast majority of cases it has proved to be wildly optimistic. In 1944, however, after the Allies had broken out of their Normandy beachheads and the Soviets were pressing forward in the east, it really should all have been over in a matter of months. The story of how this opportunity to end the war was bungled is a fascinating one, told here through the eyes of the defiant Germans who strung the fighting out deep into the following year.

The book makes use of intelligence reports, which revealed the incredible fact that German morale remained high in many units through the autumn of 1944, when the game appeared to be up. Confidence in a German victory also remained robust, even as France was liberated.

This sort of fighting spirit was obviously key to the Germans’ prolonged resistance, but so too was the failure of the Allies to come up with a winning gameplan. Jonathan Trigg brings the story to vivid life with telling interjections from a huge variety of sources, weaving a compelling narrative that is as readable as it is enlightening. Occasionally focus slips, such as during a lengthy examination of Allied decision-making when trying to decide how best to bring the war to an end – but for the most part this is a gripping book of a nation brought to its knees, yet refusing to surrender. **DS**

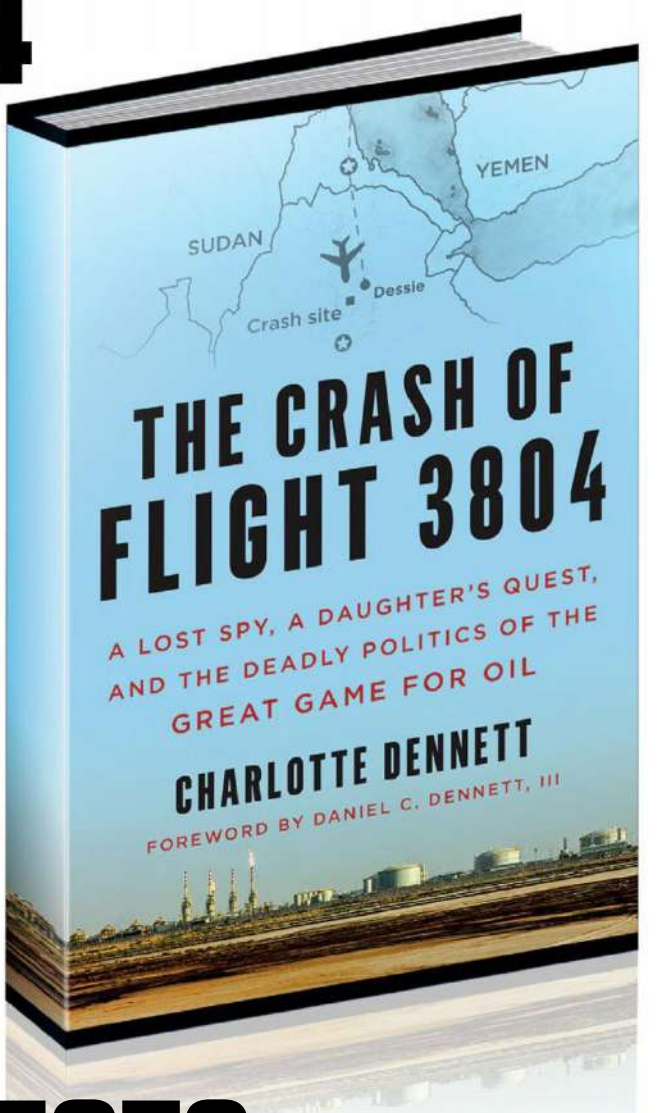
“GERMAN MORALE REMAINED HIGH IN MANY UNITS THROUGH THE AUTUMN OF 1944, WHEN THE GAME APPEARED TO BE UP”



THE CRASH OF FLIGHT 3804

A LOST SPY, A DAUGHTER'S QUEST AND THE DEADLY POLITICS OF THE GREAT GAME FOR OIL

Writer: Charlotte Dennett **Publisher:** Chelsea Green Publishing
Price: £21.99 **Released:** 7 May 2020



In 1947, American Middle East master spy Daniel Dennett was dispatched to Saudi Arabia to study the route of the proposed Trans-Arabian Pipeline. The pipeline from Saudi Arabia to Lebanon was in its day an important factor in global oil trade, as well as US and Middle East political relations. The pipeline's construction was mainly managed by the American engineering and construction firm Bechtel, hence Washington's keen interest in the project.

Bennett never suspected this was to be his last assignment, for on his flight to Saudi Arabia his plane went down killing everyone on board. Nearly three decades after that tragic air crash, Dennett's journalist daughter Charlotte retraced her father's footsteps in the Middle East. After years of digging into his post-war counterintelligence files, Dennett reveals in her book how feverish competition among superpower intelligence networks, military and big oil interests have fuelled indiscriminate attacks and targeted killings that continue to this day.

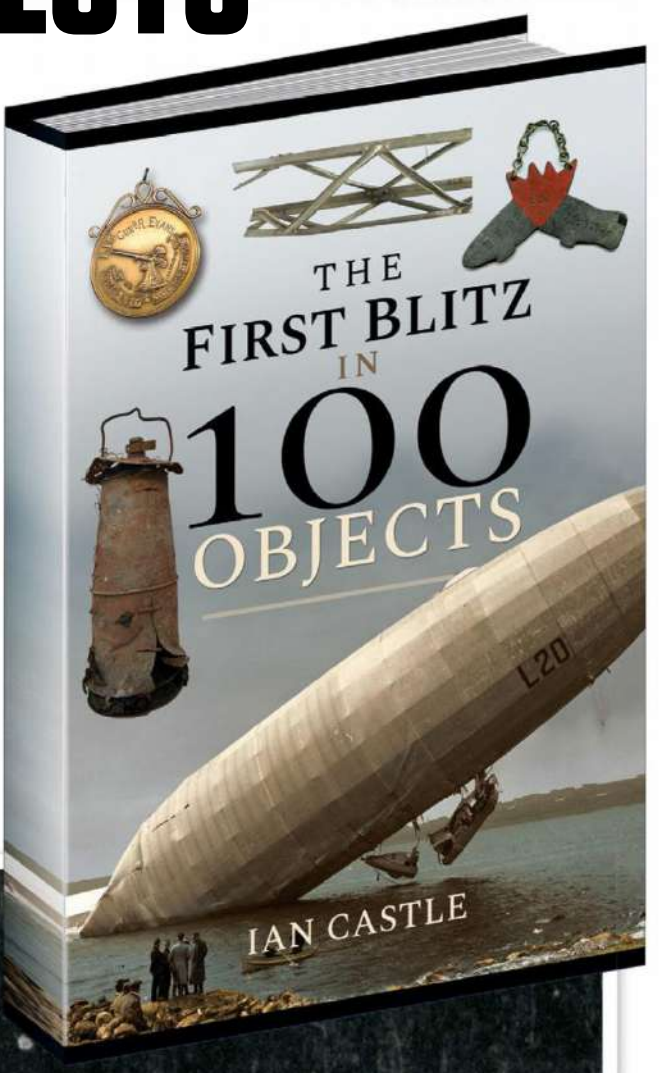
The author delivers an indictment of these dark forces and the violence they incite. Moreover, she explains how this has shaped the Middle East and its era of seemingly endless wars. She contends that the Great Game for oil is one of civilisation's dirty secrets, albeit one that it is one well-known to a clique of elected presidents, dictators, foreign ministers, economic advisors and, of course, oil company executives. It is also a tale known to an outer circle of espionage agents and a handful of journalists.

Dennett is one of those reporters who has spent decades sleuthing to get to the bottom of the intrigues that led to the fateful plane crash in 1947. In doing so, she has produced a remarkable narrative of the politics of the oil industry. **JS**

THE FIRST BLITZ IN 100 OBJECTS

AN ILLUSTRATED STUDY OF BRITAIN'S AERIAL BOMBARDMENT IN WORLD WAR I

Writer: Ian Castle **Publisher:** Pen & Sword **Price:** £25 **Released:** Out now



"There was a smell of burning everywhere in the sky … a cloud of ascending sparks," wrote Second Lieutenant Wulstan Tempest on downing a Zeppelin L31. "It was a sensation I shall always remember … almost as though I came from another world."

Ian Castle takes us on a fascinating journey, from the first aerial bomb dropped on Britain (which landed some 300 metres from Dover Castle on Christmas Eve 1914), the onset of full-scale Zeppelin attacks (from 19 January 1915), to the arrival of the German twin-engine Gotha bomber later in the war.

The author's enthusiasm keeps the narrative lively and informed. During the First World War there were 52 Zeppelin raids on England, killing 556 people and injuring another 1,357, and through 1915 and 1916 the looming presence of the airship became a part of everyday life. Castle tells this story through a variety of memorabilia: relics of incendiary bombs, church memorials, a commemorative china vase – and even an animal bone dropped from a Zeppelin by parachute (over Wrotham Park, Herts), captioned with grim humour, "A memento from starved-out Germany."

London was the primary target of these attacks, and Ian Castle uses photographic evidence and eye-witness accounts to chronicle the destruction caused, and ordinary people's bravery and resilience. In doing so, his valuable book illuminates an earlier Blitz, one that would set the ground rules for facing and defeating the German aerial bombardment of World War II. **MJ**

© Getty

British civilian defence forces fire on a German Navy airship caught in searchlights during WWI

French Resistance fighters sabotage the Marseille-Paris railway in Romanèche, on 30 August 1944

© Getty

THE TWINS

TWO SOLDIER BROTHERS WAGE A PERSONAL WAR AGAINST THE NAZIS IN REVENGE FOR A U-BOAT ATTACK THAT KILLED THEIR ENTIRE FAMILY

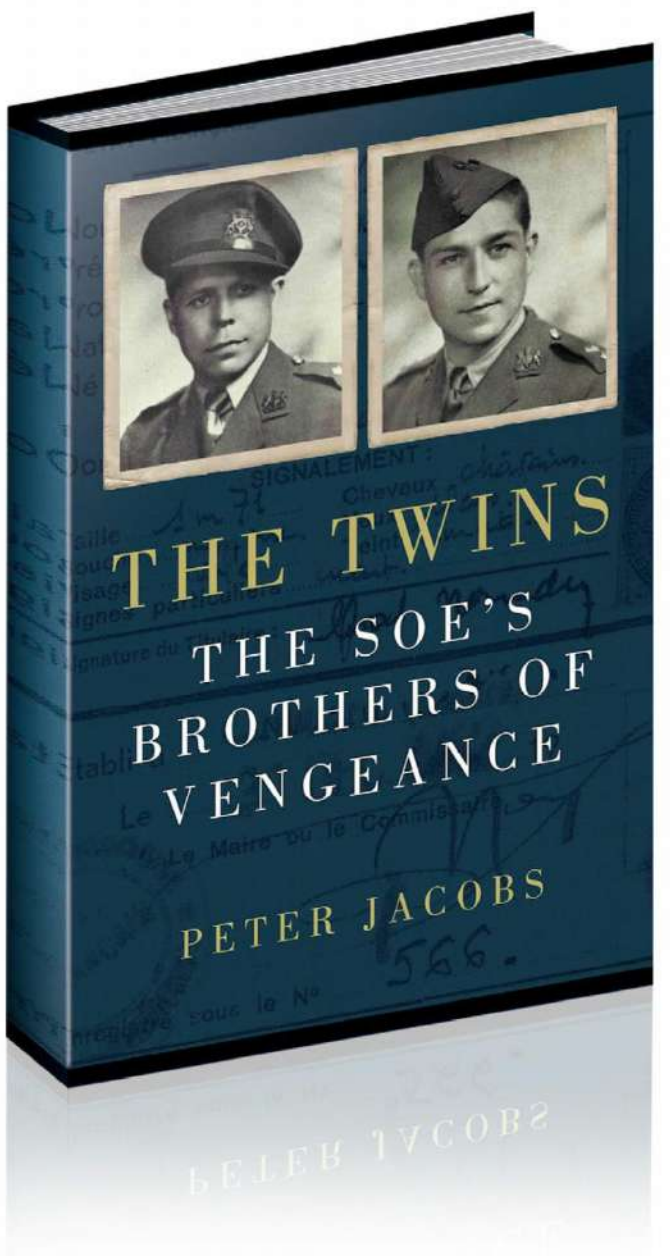
Writer: Peter Jacobs **Publisher:** The History Press **Price:** £20

After having set up one of the first underground organisations in France, being captured and escaping over the Pyrenees into Spain, brothers Henry and Alfred Newton were delivered the devastating news that the mercy ship carrying their entire family – parents, wives, children – had been torpedoed and sunk by a Nazi U-boat with the loss of all aboard. From that moment on, the Newton brothers were consumed with a passion for revenge.

Recruited by the Special Operations Executive (SOE), and known to everyone simply as 'The Twins' they waged their own personal war against the Nazis in France. For 18 months the two agents lived on the edge, before being caught by the Gestapo and eventually taken to Buchenwald. They miraculously survived the horrors of the concentration camp and were liberated at the end of the war.

Peter Jacobs tells the amazing story of the Newton brothers, from the day they received the tragic news of the loss of their loved ones, to their derring-do wartime exploits and finally their return to London, where they were quartered in a house used by the SOE to accommodate stragglers. The brothers shared each other's happiness for having received an MBE for their heroic work in France. The war was over but like so many returning soldiers, what did the future have in store for them?

Above all, their thoughts were what had happened to their parents, their wives and the smiling faces of their children. As Jacobs tells the story, "The memories and the pain came flooding back. They suddenly shared an overpowering sense of sadness and loneliness, as they had done so many years in the past, after the show had ended and the audience had gone home." **JS**



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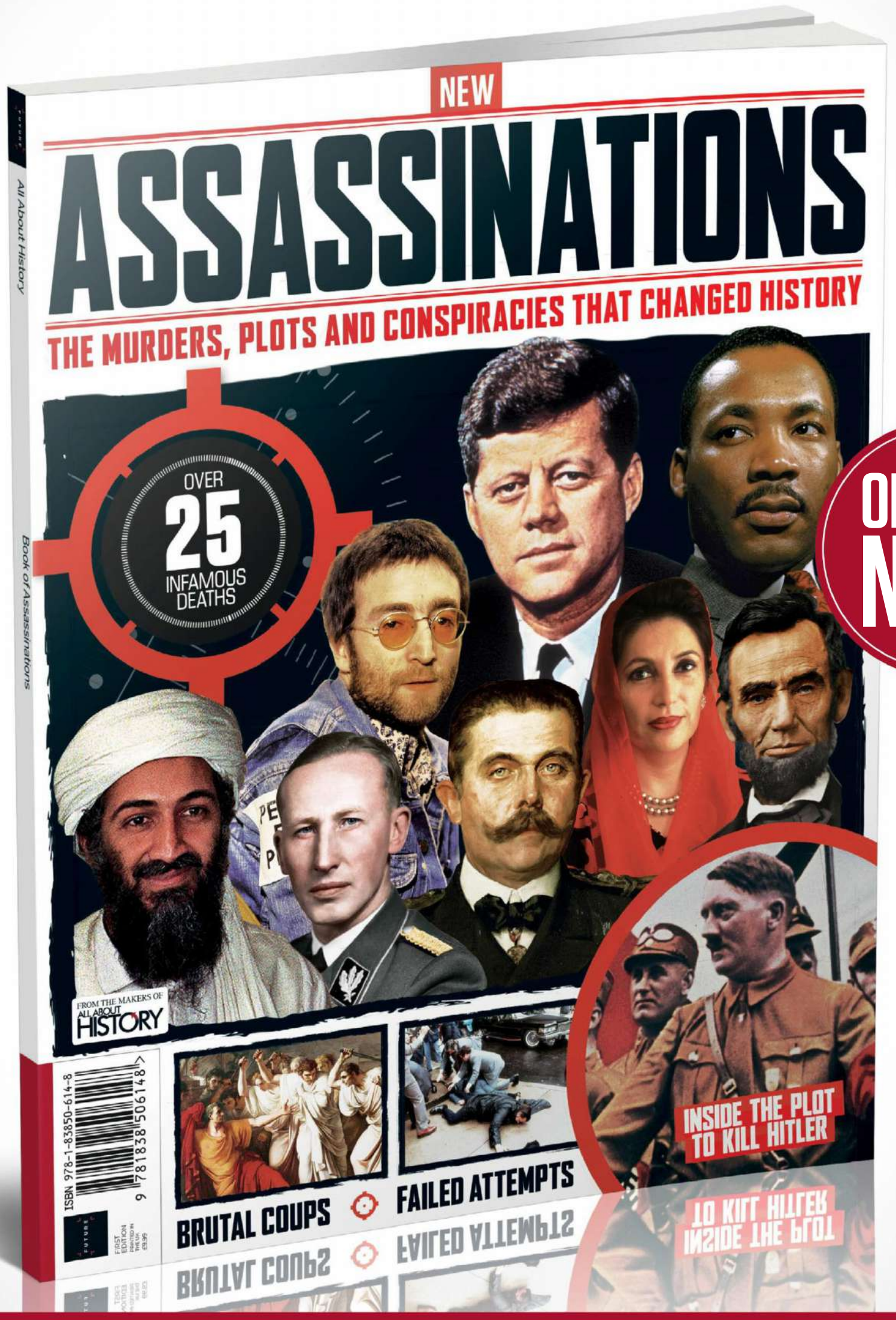

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A British grenadier pictured holding a captured French standard in a tapestry depicting the Battle of Blenheim in 1704. The tapestry was one of a series commissioned by Marlborough and they now hang in the State Rooms at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire

© Alamy

18TH CENTURY GRENADIER'S CAP

This headpiece from an early Irish regiment in the British Army was associated with an officer who fought in the War of the Spanish Succession

Robert Parker (1666-1746) was a native of Kilkenny, Ireland, who ran away from home as a teenager to enlist in an independent infantry regiment. A Protestant, Parker was one of 4,000 soldiers who were dismissed from military service when the Catholic James II remodelled his Irish army in 1685. Following the Glorious Revolution of 1688, he was able to re-enlist and joined the Earl of Meath's Regiment.

Loyal to the Protestant William III, the unit was renamed the Royal Irish Regiment in 1695 and Parker served as an ordinary soldier. After conspicuous bravery at the Siege of Namur in the same year, he was awarded a commission as an ensign. Parker was subsequently promoted to captain in 1706, which was an unusual achievement for a commoner at the time.

During his service, the Royal Irish were embroiled in the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-13) and fought under the overall command of John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough. Among its numbers were grenadiers – expert soldiers who used primitive grenades. Unlike ordinary troops who wore broad-brimmed tricorne hats, grenadiers wore brimless caps to minimise contact with grenades.

Pictured, right, is a rare surviving example from the Royal Irish Regiment dating from c.1710. Made of wool cloth, it depicts the harp of Ireland on embroidered thread. The cap would have been worn by a low-ranking soldier but it came into the possession of Robert Parker's family. It is unknown why this came about but it's possible that the cap could have been worn by a man under Parker's command. In later life, Parker published an autobiography of his career entitled *Memoirs Of The Most Remarkable Military Transactions From The Year 1683 To 1718*.

This type of cap was known as a 'mitre'. Ironically, this design was favoured by European Protestant armies, while their Roman Catholic equivalents preferred fur caps

Source: National Army Museum

NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM

The Grenadier's Cap is held in the collections of the National Army Museum in Chelsea, London.

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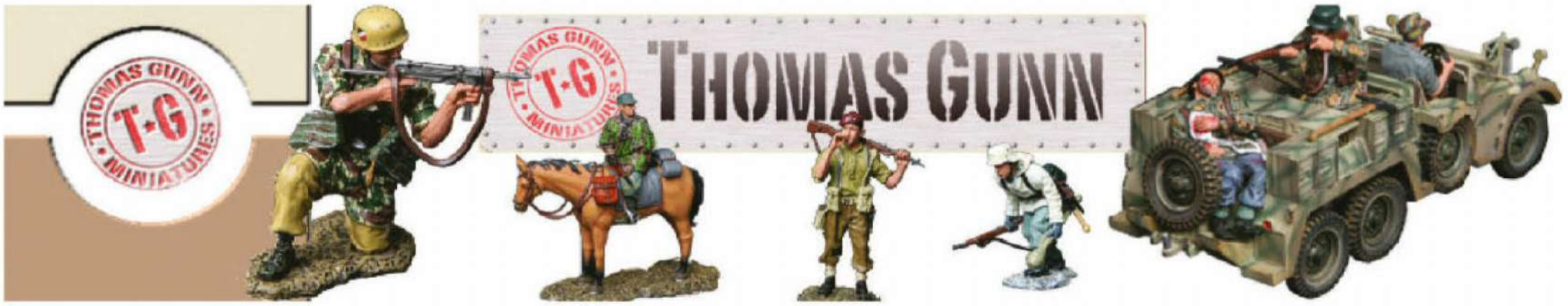

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